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ARGOSY

NOVEMBER, 1953
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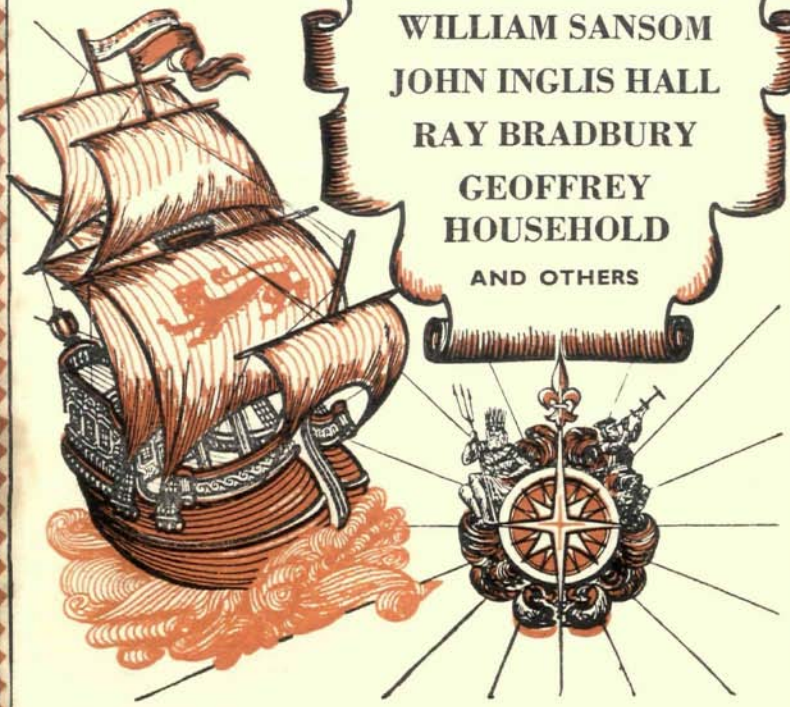

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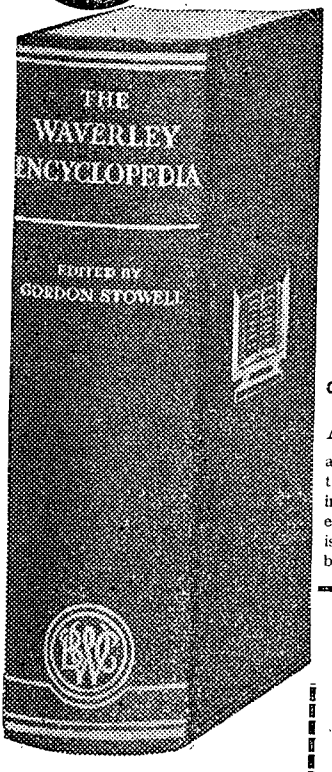

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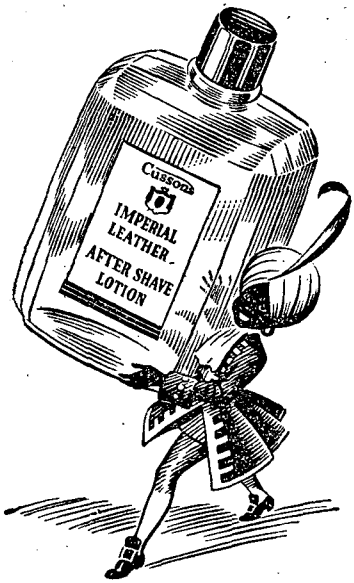

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ARGOSY

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Full Moon

SHE was wearing the coral taffeta trousers
Someone had brought her from Isfahan,
And the little gold coat with pomegranate blossoms,
And the coral-hafted feather fan ;
But she ran down a Kentish lane in the moonlight,
And skipped in the pool of the moon as she ran.

She cared not a rap for all the big planets,
For Betelgeuse or Aldebaran,
And all the big planets cared nothing for her,
That small impertinent charlatan,
As she climbed on a Kentish stile in the moonlight,
And laughed at the sky through the sticks of her fan.

VICTORIA SACKVILLE-WEST

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SECRET VINTAGE

The stream of wine hit the tiles with a splash

by GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD

MARGIT was an island like the rest of us. In the set of complicated currents she kept her shores intact only by loyalty to what was best in herself. She had not much else to be loyal to.

She was a Hungarian peasant who had earned her lonely living as a servant in Budapest ever since she was fourteen years old. Social democracy and a husband with a bit of land—those were her desires, political and personal. Towards the present régime she was dully neutral, for it snatched away with one hand what it gave with the other.

She took pride in her skill, and as much in her employers as they permitted. For the last six months she had worked for a middle-aged consulting engineer, respectable and law-abiding. He seldom laughed, and his ready smile seemed to spring from a natural courtesy rather than any personal interest. He left no doubt, however, that he appreciated her cooking, and that was enough for Margit.

She used to day-dream—failing a better subject—that he had asked her to be his wife, though any woman could see that he was dedicated to something, perhaps the memory of a former love, more distant than marriage. The dream never lasted longer than the washing-up of two plates and a coffee cup.

Margit knew very well that she hadn't the beauty to revive a dead heart. All her mirror told her was that she was squat and thick and brown; it couldn't reveal that her eyes were gay and that she moved with light feet and a provocative swing of the skirt. That touch of gallantry had been born of the czardas danced in the village of her girlhood, and was kept alive by the barrel of excellent wine in her kitchen.

The barrel was a present from her brother, who had inherited the little family vineyard and contrived to hold back enough of the harvest to supply himself and her. The rest went to the state cellars for export. Margit was puzzled that wine should have become so scarce and expensive. In the days before the war a generous employer would no more have thought of reckoning up what was

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drunk in the kitchen than of counting the potatoes.

So Margit treasured her hundred-litre barrel. She wasn't a heavy drinker. At the moderate rate of a big glass for lunch and another for supper, there was only enough to keep her morale more gay than grim for about two hundred days. The barrel, too, was a symbol. It brought into the worried city a sense of solidarity with her village—a spiritual rather than political class-consciousness. She felt for her hundred litres the welcome that a business woman would give to a hamper of flowers from the garden of her first lover.

Some of her treasure, of course, she had to share ; but that, too, was joy. She was enabled to be gracious and to indulge the aristocrat that lived in her peasant heart. So, when she received a visit from the well-dressed gentleman who had recently begun to sit outside the café at the corner, it was hospitality rather than fear which made her draw a jug for him.

She knew what he was. Among the humble there was unspoken alliance for the recognition of secret police. The porter of the block, who that very day had been ordered by the well-dressed gentleman to give him a weekly bulletin of information, had dutifully kept the secret, but handed out broad hints to chosen friends.

The policeman in Margit's kitchen was a very superior specimen of the breed—not at all the type which normally collected information from porters. She greeted him with the politeness reserved for a class above her own, and hovered hospitably over him.

" Good wine, this ! " exclaimed the gentleman from the café at the corner, stretching his legs under the table.

" Is your employer rich ? "

" My brother sent it me," she replied. " It has nothing to do with the master."

"And what does he drink himself over there ? "—the visitor jerked a thumb towards the narrow passage which led, through a faintly delicious atmosphere of spices and onions, to the office and dining-room of Margit's consulting engineer.

" Whatever he can get, sir."

" And plenty of it, eh ? "

The visitor, determined to be a democrat, pinched her playfully. Margit's reception of the compliment was cold. She knew from experience that her rotundities were eminently pinchable, and she did not—for example, with the porter—take offence. But the caress of her visitor was incorrect ; he made it appear a studied gesture rather than an irresistible temptation.

Margit dropped her best manner and answered him with a rough frankness. That was one good thing about the present régime. You needn't—if you belonged to the proletariat—bother

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with ceremony when you didn't feel inclined.

"How can anyone get plenty of it?"

"Complaining of the régime, are you?"

"Listen, I'm a peasant! Better off, worse off? I don't know. Wait and see—that's what we say."

"What about the visitors here? Is that what they say?"

"Do you think I've nothing to do, cocky, but crawl up the passage and listen at the door?"

The visitor gave a hoarse chuckle, into which Margit's wine and pleasant, broad accent had injected some sincerity. "We come from the same district," he exclaimed. "I see that!"

"Every district has some black pigs among the white."

"That's the end, sweetheart," he said—quite tolerantly, but as if the inevitable time had come to exchange good-fellowship for his normal business attitude.

"Sit down!" Resignedly she sat down opposite him at the kitchen table. He represented the limitless power of the state. There was no need for him to explain or threaten, and they both knew it.

He drew from his pocket three photographs of the same man: full face, right profile, and left profile.

"Have you ever seen that one?" he asked her.

"No."

"Have you ever heard the name of Istvan Sarvary?"

"No. Who's he?"

"An enemy of our country, my girl. A revolutionary and warmonger. And at last I'm on his track. Look at those photos, and take your time."

Margit obeyed. The police photographs were clear, glossy prints, upon which every detail could be seen. The subject looked like an unwashed criminal, hollow-cheeked, sneering, and obstinate. She did not recognize the face. Then, in the left profile, she noticed the man's glasses. They were round, old-fashioned, and of heavy tortoise-shell, and there was a home-made repair just in front of the left ear, where the rivet or binding had been wrapped in some soft substance to prevent rubbing.

A possible identity for Sarvary at once occurred to her. Yet it was so unlikely that there was no sudden start of recognition in her eyes or mouth for the trained interrogator across the table to leap upon.

"You are interested?" he suggested.

"You told me to take a long look."

"And what do you see?"

What she saw in the eye of the mind was a drawer in the consulting engineer's dressing-table, and a pair of old glasses with the left bar wrapped round by a neatly sewn strip of wash leather. Could they be the same glasses? Was it possible for a haggard,

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clean-shaven man with dark, wavy hair to turn into her employer with his well-rounded cheeks, his straight white hair greased firmly back, and his white luxuriant moustache which looked as if it had been over his mouth for the last thirty years?

Then there was his nose. The man in the photograph had a strong, fleshy nose, quite ordinary. Her employer had a Roman nose with a marked and distinguished bump on its bridge. The shape of it, she remembered—almost with a giggle—seemed to change in hot weather. No, of course it was unthinkable. Her kind master could not be a man wanted by the police, a barbarian trying to bring about another war.

"I've seen someone like him," she said at last.

She couldn't tell how much her face had given away. Something, yes. The keen peasant game of buying and selling was in her blood. She knew, from the parallel of the market-place, that her hesitation had been too long and that she must explain it.

"Who?"

"The new notary of our village."

"They have a queer breed in your village," he remarked contemptuously. "Stop fooling, girl! When did this man come to see your employer?"

"Never."

"Then what was he doing—the person whom you thought the photograph resembled?"

"Our notary? He makes too much money at home to come to Budapest."

The visitor rose from the table and brutally dominated her eyes.

"If you hurt me, I'll scream," she threatened. "They know I'm respectable here."

"Hurt you? My dear, we don't do that sort of thing. I'm just going to give you time to remember."

The gentleman from the corner café strolled impassively across the kitchen and turned on the tap of the barrel. The thin, fast stream of wine hit the tiles with a neat splash.

Margit shrieked, and leaped for the tap rather than for him. At once she made brutal contact with her chair again, arms bruised, bewildered by the dexterity with which she had been flung back.

"We like wine in our district, don't we?" he said. "Barrel full?" "Yes. Yes, sir," she begged. "Nearly full."

"Then it will take about ten minutes to empty it. Plenty of time to talk."

The purple and pink foam that had jumped from the kitchen tiles subsided, and the lake of wine deepened and spread.

"Please, sir! Please!"

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"But I shall be delighted to turn it off when you've told the truth. A pity for such good wine to be wasted! I should say your brother's is a rather stony soil facing south," he replied, talking with an exasperating slowness.

"It didn't remind me of the notary. I swear it," she sobbed, the big tears ricocheting off her apron into wine.

"Ah? Of whom, then?"

"Nobody. I was impertinent. I've never seen the face before."

"And the name Istvan Sarvary? Have you never heard it? Or overheard it, perhaps? Think now! That's a generous tap you have there."

"No, never! Never, sir! I've never heard it."

The words were loud and incoherent with grief. The lake of wine found out an imperceptible slope and began to run towards the passage. At the door it deepened to a quarter of an inch, and the colour changed from a pink transparency to black with red reflections.

"He might have come here without you knowing it?"

"Yes, yes, of course he might," she answered eagerly.

"You're not sure that you haven't seen him, then?"

"No. How could I be sure?"

"Then we have only to take a little step further. Look! I'm just going to shut off the tap. Tell me when it was he might have come here—that's all I want to know."

Margit was utterly muddled. What he invited her to say sounded so reasonable. Why on earth was she letting her wine run away when she had only to tell him a date, a movement, her crazy suspicion, anything? Yet—she didn't tell lies.

She opened her mouth and nothing would come. All the inhibitions of the Christian Europe that had made her stood in the way. Had she been asked outright whether her employer could be Istvan Sarvary she might have answered that at least she had wondered. Might have. But there again, standing at the gate, was all the loyalty of a feudal system that had vanished and left nothing but its good behind.

"I can't tell you. I don't know."

The interrogator kept the barrel running.

"Won't, little one, not can't! Won't, you mean."

She heard the front door open and shut as her employer came home.

"Good heavens, what's all this?" he exclaimed.

He bounded up to the passage on the track of the wine, and caught the visitor with his hand still on the tap.

"Margit, your wine! What's all this?"

Margit's face was bedabbled with tears. The gentleman looked confused and guilty.

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"Tap leaking?" the consulting engineer asked.

"He turned it on," she sobbed.

"Friend of yours?"

"No, no, no!"

"Well, then—ah, I think I understand! But, my dear sir, if you had anything to ask, why didn't you come to see me? I know everyone in the building and my reputation is sound, I hope. No good telling you I'm a party member—too old, for one thing. But what I always say is, they're doing fine work for Hungary. Example to all Europe, eh? We're both patriots, aren't we? Well, there's the bond. Now you put me through the hoops in any way you like."

Her master was so friendly and natural that Margit at once put out of mind that imagined identity. After all, there was more than one pair of mended spectacles in the world. And then his nose! You couldn't alter a nose that God had made.

"What do *you* know of Istvan Sarvary?" the visitor shot straight at him.

"Sarvary? Why, I thought he was abroad. Don't tell me the swine has managed to get back to Budapest!"

"He was a friend of yours, was he?"

"No, he wasn't. Far from it! But you've come to the right shop, my dear sir. I'll answer all your questions. We can't have men like Istvan Sarvary about. Margit, there's nothing to drink in the house. May we borrow what's left in the barrel? I'll make it up to you. We'll try to get something as good as yours."

"You're generous," the gentleman sneered suspiciously.

"You think so? I'll tell you how it is. I don't want the State to show pity. Try the dogs, shoot them, exile them, put them to work! They're expendable, aren't they? But a little woman like this—well, when she gets in the way, the State can't help it and mustn't show pity. Never! But chaps like you and me are free to do what we can. That's what I say."

Margit didn't agree at all with this view of the State, but she assumed it was politics and over her head. If a man with a good heart accepted cruelty, it meant nothing and was just words.

The man from the corner café took Margit's employer a little aside, and warned him of something in a low voice.

"She? Oh, I don't think she could have seen him. But you never know. Well, if there's anything at all, you'll get it out of her. Better methods than wine taps, eh?

"Now let's sit down. It must be seldom that you get a real hot tip straight from the horse's mouth and a jug of first-class stuff to go with it. If you don't mind my saying so, I've watched the scent of that wine making you more human every minute."

The visitor grinned, then pulled himself together with military

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solemnity and declared that he had no time for gossip.

" This gossip is going to be worth your while, captain. I'll tell you for a start one man whom Sarvary is likely to be seeing—his wife's cousin. You didn't know that, did you ? And you're in charge of the investigation."

" Not yet," the visitor admitted, " but I shall be. It's every man for himself in the police, and I like to wait for the best minute to put in my report. Now you help me, and I won't forget you. What would you say if I told you I'm on to a connection between Sarvary and this very house ? "

" Your very good health ! " exclaimed the consulting engineer, raising his glass. " Is that so ? Well, well, now let me see ! First of all I'll fix up my Margit, and then I'm with you. I can't have such a cook upset," he explained.

" You can't expect a little artist to work without a drink in her heart. Look here, sweetheart, here's an address ! You go there and tell them to deliver another barrel of red this evening. And you must need a rest after all this. Take the afternoon off if you want to."

He scribbled a note and gave it to Margit. She had never seen her employer so cordial. She was hurt that he had never smiled at her as genuinely as he was smiling at this filthy crook from the corner café, and hurt, too, even if she were to be compensated, that the pair of them should calmly sit down and drink up the rest of her wine. She said to herself that it was unfeeling. Just unfeeling, that was all. Not even enough to excuse a toss of the head.

" But I can't stop long," the visitor protested. " I don't want to take my eyes off this street."

" Splendid ! Splendid ! It's good to know that our safety is in your hands. But why not telephone one of your sergeants and tell him to check all movements in and out of this house in your absence? A good chance to see whether he knows his job ! You can watch him through the curtains."

Margit put her kerchief over her head and went out, leaving the two to their sly grins and good-fellowship. It was just like men, she thought, to sit down and souse on somebody else's wine and pretend they were catching enemies of the State. It didn't make any difference—townee or peasant, consulting engineer or communist, they were all the same. Wine and pinching people where people were roundest and sacrificing the helpless.

She delivered her employer's note at the address he had given her. It was a cheerless, obscure, commercial office without the heartening smell of liquor or the noisy group of customers welcome to try out many more vintages than they ever meant to buy. Well, nothing was sold any longer as, traditionally, it ought to be sold.

She called on a friend who might have comforted her, but wasn't

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in. Boozing, too, probably. Then she idled away the afternoon in public gardens and at a public meeting. After two hours she went home. It was all very well to tell her to take the afternoon off, but who would get the supper, she would like to know.

Her employer was asleep. The gentleman from the corner café had gone. Neither of them had made any attempt to mop up the lake of wine and its meandering streams, so she set to work on the kitchen. She forced herself (for she was economical) to dip a fine white cloth in the deepest pool and to squeeze it into a glass in case the wine should be still drinkable. It certainly wasn't. She was ashamed and determined to clean her floor much more thoroughly than usual, especially after chopping meat.

Then three hefty men brought up her new barrel. They didn't talk much, and they wouldn't accept a drink. They weren't at all like the delivery-men she used to know. The three rolled away the old barrel down the passage. She wondered what wood her brother was using for staves. But perhaps the barrel seemed so heavy because the delivery-men didn't get enough to eat. That must be it. In these days they made criminals into policemen and boys of good family into porters.

After that, all the tides of complication receded from her little personal island.

There was a flurry of nervousness when some police came to inquire about the gentleman from the corner café, who, it seemed, had disappeared. Her kind employer told her not to be frightened of them but to describe her interrogation just as it had happened.

"The only thing I shouldn't say if I were you, Margit," he warned her, "is that the man stayed on a little here after he telephoned his sergeant that he had gone. We don't want him to make trouble for us when he turns up again, do we?"

So Margit said nothing at all of that, and the police found the incident of the wine tap so comic that they paid very little attention to her. She disapproved of their behaviour. It was typically masculine and insensitive. But—taking the rough with the smooth, as she put it—she couldn't complain.

The new barrel of wine did not carry in it the love of a brother, but at least she would be able to taste, whenever she sat down to her meals, the remarkable generosity of her master.

* * *

SOUND BARRIER

If one hears bad music it is one's duty to drown it in conversation.

OSCAR WILDE

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SPANISH REWARD

**Fruits of the sea—fruits of action—
they are always good!**

by JOHN INGLIS HALL

IT was three weeks since the bomber crashed in the bay between Gibraltar and Algeciras. It was too hot in my best blue uniform, but I did not mind. If bravery is to be rewarded on a sultry summer afternoon, it is to be rewarded on a sultry summer afternoon: there is nothing more to be said. My batman had seen to it that my buttons and shoes were at their most brilliant. We were neither of us professional soldiers, but on that day we did our best to honour the profession of arms. He came up to my room to inspect me before I left.

"Jackson," I asked, "shall I pass muster today?"

Corporal Jackson, a solemn, meticulous suburban clerk in civilian life, checked me over as though I were a column of figures relating to minor expenditure in some important concern.

"Yes, sir. I think so, sir," he said, with his awkward, deferential smile.

"The boys'll be taking a look at your little Spanish chap this afternoon, sir," he said. "He's quite a hero. Shaky do, that Wimpey, sir. Without the old boy and his boat, the crew'd be all dead. I reckon they struck it lucky."

I nodded.

"You're right," I said. "They did."

I noticed that Jackson was looking pretty spruce himself, in his best uniform, and I knew I would see him parading about, saluting with guardsman-like precision, all the afternoon. It was one of his minor oddities that he liked this feature of service life. The Royal Air Force had caused him to discover the physical, ceremonial world of discipline, and he enjoyed it.

Five minutes later, I was at the end of the jetty of the flying-boat base, waiting for the Spanish fisherman and his crew, who were rowing over from Spain to receive their official commendations and rewards.

The world was very safe and brilliantly coloured that afternoon. On such a day, it seemed impossible that an aircraft could crash

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into the sea and explode in great gouts of red flame, black smoke, and showers of hissing, fiery shards. Spain was a tranquil, bright, extended quadrant of white quays and red-tiled houses, piling up from the water and backed by barren brown hills, distant and sunlit across the glistening bay.

The boat, approaching very slowly over the smooth expanse of sea, small as a water-spider on a pond, entered the harbour at last. I was glad when a great cheer rose from the guard watching the boom at the harbour mouth. They, too, had seen the rescues three weeks before, or knew about them.

A small figure rose in the stern of the boat and answered them with a wave of the hand, slowly and with dignity, then sat down.

I had not met the captain of the fishing-boat before, though I had heard from the crew of the air-sea-rescue launch how deeply the old man had impressed them by his austere simplicity and refusal to accept any reward for what he had done. At first, he would not even take a cigarette, they told me. When they thanked him in their elementary Spanish for the lives he had saved, he only shook his head, crossed himself, and pointed to the sky.

Now, I was meeting him for the first time, to take charge, as interpreter, of the ceremonies of the afternoon.

I watched him, sitting very still in the stern of his boat, the bow cutting a small, intermittent wave as the strong backs of the two rowers bent rhythmically to the oars. They were all dressed in clean white shirts, open at the neck, blue canvas trousers and dark blue bérets. As they came near, I noticed that they also wore red cummerbunds instead of belts.

The old man gave a curt order as the boat slid towards the quay, and the rowers shipped their oars in perfect time, holding them vertically as they came alongside. An airman made the boat fast and they all stood up ; I noticed that none of them wore shoes.

I gave the old man my best salute then held out my hand. He took it and jumped lightly onto the hot stone quay beside me. His face was brown and deeply lined, his eyes narrow, hooded by his eyelids because of long years of shading them from sun and sea.

"*Tanto gusto, señor . . .*" he said, trying to understand the insignia of my rank.

"*Comandánte,*" I said.

By now the two rowers were beside him and he introduced them.

"My nephew, Bartolomé, and my grandson, Juanil," he said. "They were both with me when the aeroplane fell."

The nephew was about twenty, dark and spare, but powerfully muscled. There was a glow of health about him which was good to see. Juanil, the grandson, could not have been more than fourteen. He had pink cheeks, full lips, and gleaming white teeth,

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eyes which shone mischievously, and tightly curled, black hair. They shook hands with me shyly, bowing low over my hand as they did so.

"You probably don't know my name," said the old man. "Rafaél Pariente Lopez."

"Capitán Lopez," I said in Spanish, "it is my privilege to take you to the Commanding Officer of the Royal Air Force, who is waiting for you with a representative of His Excellency the Governor. They have looked forward for three weeks to the honour of meeting you."

The old man raised a hand, deprecatingly, and replied like a perfect diplomat.

"On the contrary, it is we who are honoured by their attentions, señor Comandánte."

He spoke with a grave power and a courtly charm which were delightful. Groups of n.c.o.'s and airmen off duty—the faithful Jackson among them—stood about the slipway and saluted us as we went past on the way to the Station Commander's Office. I felt they were there to see the face of courage, and was pleased. As I returned their salutes, I said to the old man: "Señor Capitán, I reply to their salutes as an Officer, but these salutes are really for you—you and your crew. The men have all come out this afternoon in your honour."

He glanced at me with quick appreciation, and smiled.

"Bartolomé, Juanil," he ordered, "remove your caps!"

Carrying their bérets, the three Spanish fishermen walked proudly beside me to the Station offices. At the door, the Sergeant-Major gave us a thunderous salute.

"These the men, sir?" he said. "But one of them's only a kid! About the same age as my eldest! They're pretty lucky to be meeting the C.O. and not St. Peter, if you ask me, sir. It looked like suicide—until it worked."

He congratulated each of them in turn, saying, "Bravo! Bravo!" and then went in to see if the C.O. was ready. A moment later, he opened the office door, beckoned to us, and called out: "Squadron-Leader Blacker, sir, with the Spanish gentlemen!"

I went in and they followed. I remember with a particular clarity the sound of the soft cat-tread of their bare feet on the coconut matting as they filed in behind me.

The C.O., very tall, very serious and, in a typically English way, not quite sure of himself, stepped out from behind his desk to greet them. Impressive and pleasant, in gold-braided cap and tunic with wings and a double row of decorations, his diffidence gave him an added charm. I performed the introductions.

"Señor Don Rafaél Pariente Lopez, sir, the captain of the

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boat: his nephew, Don Bartolomé, and his grandson, Don Juanil," I said, then to the three men: "Group-Captain Raines."

The Group-Captain shook them all by the hand, firmly, retaining their hands in his for a full second and looking them straight in the eyes. The boys took their cue from old Lopez and looked straight back at him. This moment over, he stepped back and smiled at me: "Tell them, very briefly, that they are welcome, Blacker," he said.

I spoke for ten seconds and, on their behalf, old Lopez nodded his thanks. Then the Group-Captain took him by the arm like an old friend and introduced him to the Governor's A.D.C. who was standing by one of the windows.

"Señor Lopez," he said. "His Excellency the Governor has sent his military Aide to represent him here today. May I introduce Colonel Stopford?"

I translated quickly what he had said while the two men shook hands. Lopez turned to me, a sudden note of command in his voice.

"Please say to these gentlemen that His Excellency the Governor does us too much honour. Will the Señor Coronél have the kindness to tell His Excellency this, with great respect, and thank him for his consideration, which we shall always remember with pride?"

Again I translated, and the C.O. exchanged smiles with Stopford.

"An Ambassador couldn't do better!" he commented. "Dignity needs no shoes! I'm going to say my piece now, Blacker. Will you translate at the end?"

He cleared his throat and began.

"Gentlemen," he said. "We meet with the approval of His Excellency the Governor of Gibraltar, who is the representative of the Crown. Three weeks ago today, you placed our country, the Royal Air Force, and especially, perhaps, five English families, in your lasting debt. For this reason, I am glad that you, Señor Don Lopez, your nephew and your young grandson, are all of one family.

"We all wish, in some measure—it can never be fully repaid—to honour this debt. When you rowed into the fire to rescue the crew of our aircraft, who were in danger of being burnt to death, you lost much—your fishing-nets which you cut, your sea-clothing, your oars. Permit us to replace these things, and add to them a few modest gifts of our own.

"Gentlemen, your bravery will long be remembered! I, who saw your action from start to finish, shall never forget it as long as I live. I shall also tell the families of the men you saved of their debt to you. So, in your lives you will never lack grateful thoughts.

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There will be mine, those of all the men who witnessed your bravery, those of the parents of the men you saved, and finally, those of the men themselves who, I am happy to tell you, are all on their way to recovery."

I translated the speech to the three men, slowly, moved by its simplicity. Somehow, my Spanish rose to the occasion. It gave me a deep inward pleasure that, on that day, it should have been equal to the task which it was set.

There was a silence between us all as I ended. Colonel Stopford, who was a Spanish scholar, broke it by saying quietly: "Well done, Blacker! Worthy of the occasion!"

We led old Lopez and the two boys over to the table where our gifts were laid out for them to see—a fine new net, black with its myriad knots, shining oilskins from naval stores, white oiled sweaters with high necks, sea-boots, and finally, the three envelopes containing money with which they could shop in the town.

"Tell them, Blacker," said the C.O., "that these are our gifts. We could never repay them in full for what they have done. They are only tokens."

It was then that Señor Don Rafaél Pariente Lopez astounded us all. He stepped forward and touched each of the piles of gifts, as though taking possession of them symbolically, then turned to us and spoke: "Gentlemen," he said, "Representative of His Excellency the Governor, Señor Coronél, Señor Comandánte. I am a humble man, but being older than any of you, I dare to speak.

"You, Señor Coronél, have praised us for what you have called our courage. No praise could be dearer to us. Brave is what all men worthy of the name seek to be called.

"Yet there was no bravery in what, with God's help, we were able to do. We were near when the disaster happened. For men, there was no turning back.

"The sea teaches quickness in action. We cut our nets: you have given us new nets. These, with one oar, were our only losses on that day. You have given us two new oars, a pair in exchange for one! For the rest, you have pretended that we lost sea-clothing, boots, woollen clothing. We had none. All that we own among us at home does not equal one of these gifts. This is a gracious thought as well as a great kindness, enabling us to accept what we might otherwise have felt bound to refuse.

"We accept, too, your praise. We must. It would be discourteous to question your judgment by rejecting a sentiment so generous. As a family, we are happy to have saved the sons of five English families. Let us thank God for His great mercy to us all . . ."

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He paused, crossed himself, then continued: "Though I accept what you have said about us proudly, yet I end as I began, by saying this. There was no bravery in what we did. Had we avoided the danger, gentlemen, had we said to ourselves, 'There is a fire. The aeroplane may explode. We are afraid,' and rowed away, how could we then have returned to our own countrymen, who saw the accident just as you did?

"How could we have returned to our womenfolk and still called ourselves men?"

To translate so moving a speech was difficult, not because the sense was hard to follow, but because of the difficulty I had in mastering my feelings. The whole atmosphere was charged with emotion. When I reached the end, the Group-Captain stepped forward and shook old Lopez by the hand.

"He pipped me easily, the old blighter," he said, concealing his own emotion behind a trivial, slangy phrase. "What's the use of a university education in face of that? Wasn't Blacker's translation a bit too classical, Stopford? I can hardly believe that the old chap said all that!"

Colonel Stopford shook his head.

"No," he said. "If anything, he underplayed it. Captain Lopez is a brilliant natural orator—and a great man. Good luck to him!"

As we parted on the jetty that evening, their boat loaded with goods, all passed for the Spanish customs by virtue of a special certificate issued by the Spanish Consul-General in Gibraltar, the old man smiled as he shook hands, first with the C.O., then with me.

"I shall send you my first catch of fish with the new net," he said. "You will do me the honour of accepting them, Señor Coronél? The fruits of the sea, the fruits of action—they are always good!"

* * *

MORE TOMFOOLERY

We have received news of the further progress of the curate's erudite cat (in our September issue) whose studies in alphabetical Greek were arrested at the letter "mu":

The curate's fiasco at Kew
Had a curious consequence, too;
For whenever he met
His unfortunate pet
The creature enquired, "What's v?"

DUNBAR HEDDLE

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★ *"Mr. Sansom can make you see, hear, taste, touch and smell to his order"—Eudora Welty's tribute to this evocative writer is brilliantly illustrated by this colourful autumn story.*

CAT UP A TREE

by WILLIAM SANSOM

A WILD, glassy morning—all winds and glitter . . . the sun glared low between the chimneys, through black winter branches, blinding you at a slant, dazzling white and bright, straight in the eyes—it made a splintering dance of everything, it made for squints and sniggering . . .

Winds swept from nowhere, scooping up leaves and hustling them round the corner, knocking little dogs sideways, snatching and flapping at your trouser-legs. Cold nipped at noses and pinched ears red . . . it sang with cold in the keen bright light.

Under a white sky the walls, roads, people, trees shone brightly coloured, red, green, blue, grey colours, as in a folk-tale, as if everything were made of coloured glass. Behind white cloud the sun hung and fiercely glowed, a monstrous incandescent mantle. A gentleman crossing the road moved like a puppet, parts of him glittering—one feared that by his own tread he might smash to smithereens his polished boots on the brittle macadam . . .

Gentleman? He was no gentleman, he was a fireman. A jerky, puppety fireman, in blue trousers piped red, black jogging top-boots, and in his braces and white sleeves. He carried a broom. He looked like a puppet because he was then crossing the road in the light—he walked so slowly against the hustling and swirling of the leaves, the dust, the winds, the shattering light.

Hindle Rice, *alias* Pudden, number sefenty-sefen-too-too-fife, going then through the big red door into the Appliance Room white-tiled like a clean lavatory for motor cars, where big top-heavy engines stood and waited, where now Pudden Rice would sweep together over the tiled floor a few small piles of dust, leaving these neat pyramids for the officers to see as they passed in their peaked caps, while in the shelter of such evidence of work proceeding, Pudden Rice would for the rest of the morning lean on his broom and think or chat or smile to the good-mornings, or break-for-tea, or perhaps, if he felt brave, drop the precious broom—

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altogether and abandon his alibi to collect and break up twigs for firewood for home.

Rice soon dropped the broom. Out in front of the station the black wintry twigs cracked and snapped in his hands. That sunlight caught his eyes, so he could see nothing in front but bright light, as of a halo; and to each side things moved too quickly and glittered like glass.

A cat went dashing past, its fur ruffled forward by a following gust of wind. Up the street two navvies were hitting at a metal spike with steel hammers—the blows came ringing on the wind like sharp bells distorted. An old woman in black scurried by with her veil blown fast into her teeth: she mouthed as this tickled under nose, grimacing at Pudden Rice with her head tilted queerly to one side. Yet in a little garden opposite a girl sat reading, sheltered by a bush in a warm pocket of sunlight! A paper bag sailed like a wingless pouter suddenly out from some trees and on over her head—then disappeared abruptly over the top of a bush. The girl waved at its shadow, as if it might have been a fly, and remained throughout reading unconcerned.

Rice smiled to see the girl sitting so quietly. Then he saw a pile of leaves on the pavement form suddenly into single file, trickle round in a wide circle, then run for the shelter of a tree-trunk.

A window above banged open and a voice piped: "Rice! Rice!"

Pudden dashed for his broom and then carrying it walked slowly to the stairs. He climbed the stone steps, circling with them the black-barred well down which hung long grey hose-lengths and ropes, and muttered to these ship-like hangings: "Now what's the matter? Now what's up? I swept the tiles, didn't I? I done my job?"

He had reached the landing and was about to turn in through the green swing doors—when the whole station leapt alive with sound, sudden as a thunder-clap, high-pitched and vibrating for ever, flashing off the tiles, reverberating round the brass BRNNNNNNNNG—the deafening alarm bell gripped in its electric circuit and ringing on and on for ever . . .

Rice flung down his broom and dived through the swing doors. Across the room and into a passage—to a sudden end where two brass rails stood flanking a steel pole. Now the clatter of footsteps everywhere, and the alarm bell still jangling, Rice stamped his foot on a brass doorknob, a spring trapdoor shot open upwards—and there was the hole!

He jumped over it and gripping the smooth steel pole disappeared flying down. A rubber mat at the bottom, and all around

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suddenly the Appliance Room's white tiles again, with the engine of the pump already roaring, men scrambling into boots, and more coming sailing down the pole, on that light-headed morning like a rain of heavy angels.

But angels with funny faces—Nobby red-haired and pointed like a fox, Graetz with his comic round moon-face sprouting high up like a sunflower, Sailor with no neck and like John Bull washed white by a bad liver, Curly with his bright bald head, fair-haired Teetgen like a fresh blank Apollo with black teeth. These all came sliding down and scrambled for the pump, Rice among them. He jumped up on to one of the high side seats and started to pull up his leggings.

The automatic door flew open and the pump clanged out into the sunshine, as into a fog of white crystal, so that as they turned and roared off down the street light struck up from each brass fitting and from the axes and silver buttons—and somehow the heaviness was washed away.

Perched high up on the side, Pudden struggled into his coat. It flapped and blew out its short tails. He was just able to see the girl in the garden smile—and then his helmet fell down over his eyes. One legging flapped loose. The engine tore along, accelerating faster and faster, until it seemed to Pudden high up above the wind-shields that perhaps they had left the ground and were scudding through the air itself.

The officer in front clanged the clapper of the brass bell as fast as a hand could move. Up England's Lane they tore, down Downshire Hill, through the Crescent, up Flask Walk, down Well Walk, sweeping along the middle of the wide roads like an angry brass beetle, roaring up the narrow streets and scattering dogs and cats and barrows and once an old lady carrying even in November a lilac parasol.

That morning the weather had made poets of the people. It sometimes happens—an angular trick of the sun, a warmness of a wind, something stirs an exultation in the most unexpected hearts. Not in the hearts of all the people ever, but sometimes in those ready to be stirred, and sometimes also in dull hearts of which this would never have been imagined; but these people too receive a sudden jerk, a prod in the spirit, a desire for more than they usually want.

Memories arise of things that have never been, tolerance arrives. They laugh—but perhaps that is only because they are nervous at the odd look of things. A trick of the weather has transformed the street, the hour, life. Perhaps this trick is a more powerful agent than the liver or even the libido. Perhaps one day it will be agreed that finally the most critical words of all are—" good morning."

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The passers-by smiled, one waved his hat, and a middle-aged butcher brandished a chop at them. Pudden still struggled with his uniform—how it eluded him! The belt and axe caught in the hooks behind him, his round helmet kept falling over an eye, an ear—and once his foot missed its support on the running-board and he nearly fell off the machine. He gripped the brass rail just in time.

Yet, awkwardly, as these things tugged at him—the wind, the clothes, the belt—he began to grin: "What an odd engine—how peculiar that on most days it seems so heavy, so oiled and dully heavy with its iron extinguishers, its massive suction pipes, its hardwood ladders—yet today . . . all I can see about it is light, and how high it seems, how top-heavy, and most striking of all are the brass rails and the red leather cushions! It's as upright as a queen's coach! And here we are—Nobby, Graetz, Teetgen, Sailor and me and the officer—all sitting and standing high up on top, like exuberant boy scouts, or tin soldiers, or travellers packed up on top of an old-fashioned coach! Ridiculous!"

But it was really so. The engine was built higher than cars are built usually, and brass rails armed the erect red leather seats, vestiges of the horse days, a tradition to be surrendered unwillingly.

The bare trees skidded past. Rows of front doors approached and receded, innumerable windows winked and flashed in the fierce glare. The skyline of roofs and chimneys stood out black, gauntly as against a milk-white sunset. Far off there appeared a church spire, it grew into a pointed little church, into a large grey church, and then this too was gone, veering off to the left.

At last Pudden got himself straight. He then stood up and faced the wind, one leg crouched up by the ladders. This made him feel a dashing fellow. Phlegmatic usually, this pose in the wind and this clinging to a precarious rail excited him, never failing to rouse in him old postures of bravado learnt from early adventure books.

Then, in the sharp sunlight, with the little houses flashing by, he thought suddenly: "Good Lord—we're going to a fire! Perhaps to a real fire! It may possibly be a false alarm pulled by a boy or a drunk or someone. (He saw a sheet of figures—over 1,000 False Alarms Malicious last year—one of them fatal—a fireman was killed, crushed against the garage door in the rush for somebody's funny joke). But . . . perhaps it really is a fire, this one time, by chance the real thing? Asphyxia, boiling, frying—I saw a fireman frizzled up in burning oil till he was like a little black monkey, a charred little monkey, a charred little monkey wearing a tin hat several sizes too big for him. And when Sailor tripped in the molten rubber—his arm. Andy's neck after that sulphuric acid job . . ."

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Rice looked down at the two shining round helmets primping up in front of him. He laughed, and felt the corners of his mouth split and all the teeth catch in the wind, he laughed and seemed inside to shine with laughter; how could frying and falling walls happen on this kind of a glass morning? Hot smoke in this pure air? Such things happen to a rosy-cheeked crew of bright tin soldiers?

The wind echoed in his ears like a sea breeze, thrumming past as regular as telegraph wires, and still the sun shot pin-points of the brass and glared whitely from the chimneytops ahead. Suddenly Pudden began to hum a march, a high-pitched jigging march for dwarfs stumping off to the forest and anvils—as joyfully repetitive as train music . . .

They skidded round a corner and braked to a stop. They were in a cul-de-sac made up of small white houses with painted doors. Trees growing behind showed above the roofs, an effect peculiar in a large city. These looked like country cottages, and the windows were in each case so cramped up and warped that the houses seemed to be no more than a pack of doors and windows clustered together, balancing for breath. A few trained bushes stood in tubs like sentinel birds before the black and pink and primrose doors. And there on the pavement corner stood the fire-alarm post, singular and red, as bright a red as when the snow is on the ground.

They leapt off the machine, the officer ran up to the alarm and then stood by it, looking right and left, uncertain, while the broken glass twinkled beneath his polished boots. Rice thought: "Bright as the day Teetgen went to the paint factory fire and came away with his boots varnished, bright for days!"

The officer peered into the alarm—it had certainly been pulled. But no one was there to direct him. He looked up at the windows, then behind him—searching with his eyes anxiously for smoke. "That's the crazy people they are," thought Rice, "pulling the bell and then running away expecting us to find the job by magic. That's them."

A small boy appeared from behind one of the bird-bushes. The officer frowned and strode heavily towards him in his big boots.

"Well, son—and who pulled it?" He looked like a giant wooden soldier towering above the suddenly real boy. Blue coat splashed with red, silver buttons and axe, round red face as neat as a doll's, shining black leggings stiff-legged.

Ignoring the question, the boy said: "Is there a fire, mister?"

"How long have you been here?" the officer asked, his voice sharpening with suspicion—then turned his head, so that his face shone brightly in the sunlight. He yelled over his shoulder to the

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firemen peering about: "One of you—scout round the corner!"

Attracted by the sound of bells and brakes and the stamping of boots, there had by then collected a small crowd of onlookers. Half of these were boys, carrying rifles and swords, or driving small pedal-cars. One wore on his head a top hat peaked with half a brim only, painted blue and labelled Free French.

Two painters in white overalls looked sadly at the fire engine. A tall man with a thin face clouded with red veins asked if he could lend a hand. A smartly-dressed woman dragging a trolley laden with shopping smiled and smiled, as though she was the mother of all and "she knew." A man in A.R.P. uniform winked at Teetgen, because *he* knew too—he knew it was just another bloody exercise, mate. Three Jewish refugees passed hurriedly, twisting their necks round to keep the uniforms in sight, frightened, round-eyed as owls.

By then Graetz, a tall white sunflower with his round face drooping off his long neck—Graetz was standing isolated in a circle of boys and saying aloud for their benefit: "It's a false alarm—and from now on we've got our eye on this post. Got a policeman on it, we have, so in future ... ."

When suddenly in a garden wall between two houses a door burst open and a fat woman in a broad white apron came bustling out. She ran towards the Pump with her arms outstretched, as though the Pump might at any moment recede and vanish.

She began shouting as soon as she appeared: "Don't go! Don't go! Oh, I'm so glad you came! Milly's up a tree." Then paused for breath as the officer went up to her. "It's round the back, round the back," she panted, "and I pulled the alarm, you see. They told me it was right—you see, she's been up there since last night. She mews so."

The officer said: "How do we get through?" And at the same time shouted back to the men: "Cat up a tree. Bring the ladders."

Teetgen and Nobby jumped up to the front of the ladders on top of the Pump. Graetz and Rice began to pull at the bottom. The straps uncoiled and then the long ladder came sliding out. Once again Rice felt like a puppet, a wooden soldier clockworked with the others into an excited, prearranged game.

The sunlight seemed to blow by in bright gusts. Now everybody was laughing—except one of the lugubrious painters, who had a brother at sea, and who now grumbled loudly about the bleeding waste of petrol. But the other onlookers found it great sport, and in the laughing, dazzling light began to shout: "Pretty pussy!" and "Mind it don't bite you now!" and "See you keep her nightdress down!"—this last from the thin man with the bad veins.

Pulling at the ladder, Nobby said: "Last week an old girl

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called us for a parrot up a tree. But we wouldn't go. Cat-up-a-tree's legal, parrots isn't."

Now the fat woman in the apron bolted back through the garden door with the officer following. The four men carrying the ladder squeezed through at the double. Rice at the rear end nearly jammed himself between the brick wall and the heavy wooden ladder, catching his fingers in the extension pawl, nearly coming a cropper and laughing again.

Then they were in the garden—apple trees and young beech saplings, a black winter tracing of branches everywhere against the glowing white cloud beyond. The sun glared through this filigree, striping the litter of dry leaves, striping the air itself with opaque light-shafts.

"There she is, lads," shouted the doll officer, pointing upwards. The other dolls doubled up with the ladder working like clockwork, raising their knees in a jocular movement as they ran.

Above them, isolated at the very top of a tall sapling, crouched on the tapering end of this thin shoot, so that it bent over under the weight like a burdened spring—sat a huge dazed cat.

In a book of children's stories this cat would have seemed improbable and amusing. Its position was as improbable as that of a blue pig flying. It looked like a heavy young puma borne by what appeared to be a tall and most resilient twig. In real life a branch so thin would have snapped. Yet here this was—happening on a bright November morning, a real morning though rather light-headed.

In children's books, too, there are pictured with vivid meaning certain fantasies of the weather—lowering black storms, huge golden suns, winds that bend all the trees into weeping willows, skies of electric blue with stars dusted on them like tinsel, moons encircled by magical haloes. These appear highly artificial, drawn from the inspiration of a dreamland: but they are true. These skies and suns and winds happen quite frequently.

So that on that morning what appeared to be unreal was real, apparently richened by association, but originally rich in its entity that had created the fairy association. Thus this was a witches' morning, a morning of little devils and hats popping off, of flurry and fluster and sudden shrill laughter.

Teetgen put his weight on the foot of the ladder and the others ran up underneath so that the ladder rose with them until at last it was upright. It was thicker by far and heavier than the sapling—but as its head crashed into the tapering sprout branches they supported it easily.

They swayed precariously, then sprang back into position, while the cat, refusing to be disturbed by these alien perplexities,

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looked away scornfully—or, as animals often do, pretended to look away, keeping an ear cocked sharply towards the new varnished ladder-head now extending towards it.

The officer began to climb at the run, stamping on the ladder as firemen are taught to stamp, to punish the ladder and thus to control it. More than ever he appeared to be playing a game with this deliberate kicking of his boots.

Pudden and the others held the ladder firm at the bottom. They were thinking: "What if he breaks his neck? A man for a cat? What a life . . ."

Through the rungs of the ladder a line of gaily coloured underclothes flapped and danced their strange truncated dances. The fat woman stood a little way off, chequered by sunlight, her hands clasped, talking all the time. Some birds started singing, and in the middle of the city a cock crowed.

The officer pranced to the top and picked off the cat by the scruff of its neck. He stuck it on his shoulder and climbed down.

The crowd now jammed in the doorway cheered and whistled. They all wanted to stroke the cat. So did Pudden.

But as the officer reached the bottom rung the cat jumped from his shoulder to the ground. It was a black cat, fully grown, with white whiskers and paws. As it collected itself on the ground, several of the firemen stretched down their free hands to stroke it, somehow to congratulate it also upon its narrow escape.

However, the cat never even looked at them. With deliberation it stiffened its legs, so that it seemed to stand on its toes, flung up its tail straight as a poker—and walked disdainfully away from the firemen, leaving only the bright adieu beneath its tail.

By the time they had reached the station again the cloud had thickened. Beneath this new low blanket the winds had died and the air had grown dull.

Pudden jumped off the machine and looked across to the girl in the garden, ready to smile and perhaps shout across to her what they had done. But she had gone indoors.

As they backed the Pump into the Appliance Room an officer walked through and said that no coal had been delivered—it would be a cold day inside, no fire in the mess-room, an empty grate littered with cigarette ends as after some night before. Nobby said: "Firemen! And not even a bleeding fire we can call our own."

The white tiles looked dull, clean, solid, and efficient. This was again an engine-room for engines, smelling of petrol, decked with ladders and drums of oil. The fire engines again assumed their weight—their massive tyres appeared again hard and heavy

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to touch, slugging and relentless, heavily set in duplicate on thick oiled axles. The ladders and hooks and ropes and hose all appeared dull and intractable, bruising to the fingers.

Pudden Rice looked over at Teetgen taking off his jacket, at the braces and the soiled striped shirt emerging, at the man peeled of the doll.

"Well," he thought; and for a moment hesitated standing there, thinking he was thinking. Suddenly he looked up, in surprise—there seemed nothing to think about—and walked slowly over into the boot-hole, where under the bare electric light he took up the blacking brush and looked round, without success, for something to polish.

* * *

MASQUERADE

Cloaked figures, masked faces and mystery, false whiskers and princes in disguise—these are the essence of romance! Can you identify our masqueraders? Count one point for unmasking the character, one for the source and one for the author in each case, making twenty-four points in all. The first-class amateur detective will score fifteen or more! The answers are on page 76.

1. *Larger than life the eyes, the ears, the nose and—fatally—the mouth, of this falsest and most treacherous of invalids!*
2. *Highwayman's mate, and favourite of the wife of a receiver of stolen goods: no strong recommendation for this rascal of many aliases. Carbuncle is his name, or . . .?*
3. *Plea for mercy first, wiles and strategy to follow—but nothing surprises us at this extraordinary trial, not even the real identity of Defending Counsel!*
4. *In the guise of a physician he is out for vengeance, this outraged husband of stern New England . . .*
5. *A situation fraught with peril, the impersonation of a king at his coronation—even in so worthy a cause!*
6. *No festive welcome for this great island ruler, returning so belatedly to his homeland in guise of tramp, outcast and refugee . . .*
7. *His disguise was only too thorough: bright green all over, this formidable giant—green clothes, green armour, green wavy hair, and a huge green horse!*
8. *For his age he was much too big and peculiar, and if only, thought his brothers and sisters, the cat would take him! But his was a charming disposition, and obviously he was In Disguise!*

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DECEIVERS EVER

Do not trust him, gentle maiden

Frankie and Johnny were lovers.
O Lordy, how they could love !
They swore to be true to each other,
As true as the stars above.
He was her man, but he done her wrong . . .

Frankie looked in through the key-hole
And there before her eye
She saw her Johnny on the sofa
A-loving up Nelly Bly.
He was her man ; he was doing her wrong.

Traditional Ballad

Seducer's Wiles

(First bars of the Villain's music heard in the distance. William Corder enters at back. He looks round and leers at Maria. Villain's music grows louder.)

CORDER (Tapping leggings with riding whip in a sinister way) Egad thats the pretty girl who has occupied my thoughts so much since I've been here.

MARTEN Why its Mister Corder! I am glad to see you here Sir to honour our homely festivities, I heard you had arrived in our village some days ago will you join our merrymaking ?

CORDER Thanks for your kind welcome who is that charming girl ?

MARTEN Why, you have forgotten her its my daughter Maria. (Beckons her ; Maria skips towards him. Soft music) This is William Corder son of our landlord.

CORDER Miss Marten may I claim your hand for the next dance ?

MARIA (curtly) Excuse me Sir but I never dance with strangers. (Trips away, nose in the air)

MARTEN Youll excuse her Sir, she is only a country lass and doesnt know the manners of your fine London ladies, but she is an industrious girl and good as she is pretty. . . Mister Corder can I prevail on you to join us ? the fare may be humble but the welcome's great.

CORDER I thank you but I must return to the Farm, my Father's illness will not permit me to remain and accept your kind invitation.

MARTEN Then good night Mister Corder, now let us join the Merrymaking.

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(Corder alone. Villain's music; stage slowly darkens)

CORDER Pretty and coy, yet she shall be mine for I feel I love and have set my heart on possessing her. She seems to shrink from my advances, I must overcome her scruples, how? tomorrow is Polestead Fair, all the lads and lasses will assemble in the village, there must I gain an introduction to her. (Music very loud; shouting above it)

And all the arts that flattery can devise
I'll use to make her mine. (Crashing chord. Slinks away)

From the acting version of Maria Marten, edited by MONTAGU SLATER

Crime Passionnel

She was a dancer, —I was her master;
Our troupe was rollicking on at the fair:
She and a stranger bit at one sweeting, —
A large pale-green one ripe for eating.
(She has soft brown eyes and soft brown hair)—
'Twas down at the back of the booth, my sweeting,
You never knew I was there!

My brain was fire. At fall of night,
By a great black cedar, dagger'd dead,
She lay, turn'd clear to the wind's quick cries,
In the long grass writhing with flamed fire-flies,
And the white stars shrinking, high overhead.
And he was dreaming of paradise,
In a laughing wanton's bed!

THÉOPHILE MARZIALS, *The Gallery of Pigeons*, 1873

Dastardly Villain!

Twirling his moustachios Spencer pours himself out a double brandy and soda and lights one of those new-fangled cigarettes. How excellent are his prospects! Debts down to one hundred and eighty thousand Jimmy o' goblins . . . and the beautiful Julia Shuttleforth in the offing. True she hated the sight of him, but the wretched Benjamin was so demoralized that even a second-best threat should secure his consent to the match.

Spencer Faggot smacked his lips. A tasty toothful. True, he already had a wife or so somewhere or other, but what did that matter to a villain?

And now to work!

CARYL BRAHMS and S. J. SIMON, "*Don't, Mr. Disraeli!*"

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Rose Among Thorns

It was not the home of a poor man. A great terror froze her heart; —if she were not wanted here?

She went quickly through three rooms, seeing no one, and at the end of the third there were folding doors.

"It is I—Bebée," she said softly, as she pushed them gently apart; and she held out the two moss rosebuds.

Then the words died on her lips, and a great horror froze her, still and silent, there.

She saw the dusky room as in a dream. She saw him stretched on the bed, leaning on his elbow, laughing and playing cards upon the lace coverlet. She saw women with loose shining hair and bare limbs, and rubies and diamonds glimmering red and white. She saw men lying about upon the couch, throwing dice and drinking and laughing with one another.

Beyond all this she saw against the pillows of his bed a beautiful brown wicked-looking thing like some velvet snake who leaned over him as he threw down the painted cards upon the lace, and who had cast about his throat her curved bare arm with the great coils of dead gold all a-glitter on it.

And above it all were odours of wines and flowers, clouds of smoke, shouts of laughter, music of shrill gay voices.

She stood like a frozen creature and saw—the rosebuds in her hand. Then with a great piercing cry she let the little roses fall, and turned and fled. At the sound he looked up and saw her, and shook his beautiful brown harlot off him with an oath.

But Bebée flew down through the empty chambers and the long stairway as a hare flies from the hounds; her tired feet never paused, her aching limbs never slackened; she ran on and on, and on . . .

OUIDA, *Two Little Wooden Shoes*, 1874

Never Again

Farewell ungratefull Traytor,
Farewell my perjur'd Swain,
Let never injur'd Creature
Believe a Man again.
The Pleasure of Possessing
Surpasses all Expressing,
But 'tis too short a Blessing,
And Love too long a Pain.

JOHN DRYDEN, *The Spanish Friar*, 1681

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HARSH COUNTRY

"Keep out of trouble this time, Gabriel," he said

by DAVID WALKER

GABRIEL pulled the canoe up. His ears were humming from the noise of the engine, and they were humming from no sleep these past three nights. He had been hurrying to get in ; now that he had got in he did not have to hurry. He stood beside the river. He was going to see people and hear people and tell them everything and ask them—and there would be Martha. Martha.

An old Indian sat on the bank above, looking at the river, not at Gabriel. Just the two of them, the old Indian and Gabriel ; nothing doing at eight on a summer morning, not even mosquitoes, only an old Indian and Gabriel and the river.

He shaved and washed in the brown water, put on his clean shirt, brewed the last of his tea, ate a little, combed his black hair, took a bundle out, covered everything in the canoe, humped the bundle, and walked uphill at nine o'clock, it must be. The path was muddy after rain, and the tethered dogs were muddy. People would be asleep.

"Hullo, there," he called to the old Indian.

The old Indian grunted, raised his left hand, and looked at the river.

When he had reached the top of the sixty-foot bank, the first person Gabriel saw was the Mountie. He did not mind about last year ; that was all over and done with ; he was pleased to see the Corporal.

"Hullo, Corporal," he said, smiling.

"Hullo, Gabriel," said Corporal Brand. He was a tall man. He smiled a little. "When did you get in ?"

"Just got in. I made it back in three days and three nights, fast going from that country, but I was right out on account of not getting in at Easter. Left my dogs with Bob Starkey at the Lightning. How's things here ? How's Mrs. Brand ?"

"Fine, thank you," the Corporal said. "Did you make out O.K. ?" He nodded his head at the bundle of furs.

"Pretty good. I got my beaver and a few marten. Bob said

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they was paying sixty for marten at Green Mountain. That's pretty good. And I got . . ."

"They're not paying sixty here. Twenty's more like it."

The Corporal nodded to Gabriel and started off to wherever he was going. But he turned back. "How long do you figure on staying, Gabriel?"

Gabriel shrugged. "A week, mebbe two. Enough time to collect an outfit. It gets kind of so you're glad of company after a year off there." He smiled. "It gets kind of lonesome."

"That's right," the Corporal said. He stared at him. He was a hard, good man. "Keep out of trouble this time, Gabriel." The Corporal walked away.

After that Gabriel felt a little less happy for a minute about the marten price and about the Corporal saying that about trouble, but he was happy and excited at being back among people. Faces and voices. He hadn't seen faces or heard voices except animal faces and voices, and there was so much to tell and to find out and to look at before he went out again.

He walked on. Next he saw Father Tinet working in his vegetable garden. He wore the same dirty, black cassock which was so old it glinted green, and he was the same kindly, mumbling Father. He had christened Gabriel. He gave him a good welcome.

They talked for a minute, and Gabriel saw with delight how the Father's beard wobbled when he spoke, just as you had thought about it. His beard wobbled, and he went on transplanting cabbages into the damp black earth until he straightened.

"Gabriel, my son," he said. "Have you prayed to Our Heavenly Father for peace of mind?"

"Every day, Father," Gabriel said.

He said good-bye to Father Tinet until they would meet differently at Mass. He walked on, feeling Christian kindness.

Then he saw Martha, who was the person he had thought most about all the long winter in his cabin in the woods, and on the trail. Her mother had died in the winter, and now her father and her brothers would soon be off fishing.

Martha was a year older now, much more than a year more beautiful. His head sang, the world swirled round him, he felt quite faint at the sight of Martha. Her long hair was soft over her shoulders, framing her face. Martha was browner, darker than Gabriel, with a warmness of colour at her cheeks. Gabriel's father had been a white man, and his mother a Mountain Indian, so he was a half-breed, too. He was glad he had shaved and washed and combed his hair.

"Hullo, Martha," he said, smiling at her while his heart was loud.

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"Hullo, Gabriel." She smiled, too, in a remembered way; quietly knowing she was a woman wanted by men. Her eyes teased him.

"Have you been good?" Gabriel asked. He meant it as a joke, and he meant to remind her that he had kissed her last summer after the dance before he was in trouble, and he wanted to kiss her again every minute, always. Her face was sad and holy, going to belong to some man—perhaps, unbelievably, to him.

"Yes, Gabriel." Smiling again. "And you? Did you get into any fights?"

"No," he said. She knew he couldn't have been in any fights. How could he? "Is there a dance tonight?"

"Yes." Martha's full lips closed after the word, and opened and closed and opened again. "I must go. So long, Gabriel."

She walked on in her tartan skirt to wherever she was going. He watched her. She swayed. She was a mystery of love and grace, of touchable, untouchable woman or girl.

So Gabriel came to the Store. The door-bell tinkled as he went inside. Every shelf was full, which meant that the river-boat must have been through with a year's supplies, and Gabriel was in luck. He had not asked the others about that because he wanted to keep it as a surprise for himself.

He looked around, seeing the shirts, nets, traps, hooks, tobacco, flour, shells—all the things he needed, and all with magic newness. He had come in at just the right time.

Then he saw the Manager beyond in his glass office. The smell of being in a proper building painted on the outside and the inside and with fly screens and electric bulbs and even a chesterfield was strange and it was wonderful.

Mr. Johnson had paper money and coins in front of him. He was counting the money and writing in a big book, a ledger they might call it.

"Hullo, Mr. Johnson," said Gabriel as a moment came when Mr. Johnson was not in the middle of counting or writing.

Mr. Johnson looked up. It was the second time he had looked. "Oh, it's you," he said. "When did you get in?" He did not say, "Hullo, Gabriel," or anything nice like that.

"I just got in this morning," Gabriel said. "How's things bin, Mr. Johnson?"

"So—so," said Mr. Johnson. "The break-up was very late." He went on looking at his big book. "How did you make out?"

"Good," Gabriel said. "I got my beaver and marten here." He patted his bundle. "Left the rest at the canoe."

Mr. Johnson shut his big book, put the money back in the till,

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locked it in a way which made you feel he was locking it because of you, although you knew he always locked it, and said : " Come on over to the warehouse."

He went ahead. Gabriel followed along the boardwalk in the hot sunshine to the warehouse. Mr. Johnson's assistant was in there, baling furs. He was hardly more than a boy, with red hair, a stranger.

" Hullo," Gabriel said.

" Hullo," said the white boy. He smiled.

Mr. Johnson graded the beaver first. He knelt on one knee on the warehouse floor and took each skin. They were beauties, blanket beaver ; it pleased Gabriel just to look at them, and he could see that it pleased Mr. Johnson too. He poked it, stroked it, blew on it, plucked it, rolled and snapped it, then laid it down carefully, made a note on his paper, and went on to the next.

He did that with all ten. At the end he said : " They're good. I can let you have two hundred and ninety dollars."

Gabriel said nothing, but he smiled at the good price. Then Mr. Johnson did the seven marten, even more carefully. You could see that Mr. Johnson loved furs. Surely the Mountie must have been wrong about twenty for marten ?

" I can give you a hundred and seventy-two for the marten. They're good, too."

Seven into seventeen goes twice and three over, seven into thirty-two goes four times and four over. Twenty-four and a bit. So it was almost true what the Corporal said.

" Bob Starkey told me they was paying better than sixty at Green Mountain, Mr. Johnson."

" Bob Starkey's wrong," said Mr. Johnson. " He's been telling you stories."

" No, Mr. Johnson," Gabriel said politely. But he felt the first little tickle at the back of his neck. It was a long, long time since he had felt it. " I seen the paper."

" I don't know what you mean. I get my prices by radio."

" Duncan's tradin' in competition down there, Mr. Johnson. That's what I mean."

Mr. Johnson stared at Gabriel. " You can take them some place else if you want," he said.

" What place, Mr. Johnson ? "

Gabriel, my son. Have you prayed to Our Heavenly Father for peace of mind ? Every day, Father. How much would it cost to go a hundred and fifty miles to get a fair price ?

" I'll make it one-eighty," Mr. Johnson said. He lit a cigarette. " That's the best I can do. Take it or leave it."

" I'll take it," Gabriel said. He went to the door. Sharpers, he thought. " Swindlers," he muttered.

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"I'll be over in a minute," Mr. Johnson called after him; and then when Gabriel was just outside the door he heard him say: "Remember that one. He's a bad lot. Last year he . . ."

Gabriel bought what he had to have for the present. Then he went to pray alone in the church where the ceiling was blue with gold stars, and the pictures were lovely, and Christ was a white man.

Then he called on the Forest Warden to give in his affidavit and the unused seals for marten, and to mark four new beaver lodges on the Warden's map of Gabriel's trapping area, and to get his new licence. The Warden was about Gabriel's age. He gave Gabriel a cup of coffee. He had been in the North Country two years, and he knew only as empty words all the lore that Gabriel knew instinctively.

Then Gabriel went to see his cousin, the only one left of his mother's family. Gabriel's father had had no relations, of course. But his cousin was an Indian, so Gabriel, who was half white himself, had nothing to talk to him about except trapping. He wanted to talk about everything else in the world.

Then Gabriel walked back past Martha's father's hut; but he did not see her. Then he made a fire and slept beside his canoe until nearly midnight when it was time to get ready for the dance.

He was looking forward very much to the dance as he climbed the path beside the Mackenzie River. The Fathers taught in school that it was one of the biggest rivers in the world. It was big and quiet. Gabriel liked it best in the evenings. The flies were bad tonight. He came to the Mission Hall.

Gabriel made his way through the crowd—he knew them all but he did not have friends among them, and they looked at his face and moved aside. In the far corner, Albert fiddled, with a white wet face and a thumping foot: a wild demon possessing him. Everyone else thumped, and Gabriel thumped.

He could not help it and he did not want to help it and the music cried in his legs, his arms, his thighs, his stomach. It cried to him; it summoned him; it blessed him. He was happy; he forgot the bad thought he had had today just after seeing Mr. Johnson—that it would be better to stay always in the bush alone, safe from people.

Martha was dancing with the Forest Warden. Why with him? She had to dance with someone. They danced together and danced away and spun three times with eyes together, and danced away around the circle and met again and danced together.

Martha was wearing a bright blue dress the same as the one Gabriel had seen in the store and thought he would like to buy for her, and she had a bright blue ribbon in her black hair. Her hair was shining. Her eyes were shining and then downcast.

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Her bare legs flickered and flowed in a beautiful way, and the dress clung to her and flew out. Oh, she was good to look at! She was slim; she was for man; she was dreaming in the dance, not there at all, and there altogether. The dance ended.

Gabriel walked over. Martha was panting; her brow was wet. The Warden had his hand under her arm. He was leading her to a bench.

"Martha!" Gabriel said.

She turned; the Warden still held her arm. "Hullo, Gabriel," she said. She didn't smile at Gabriel, and the Warden didn't seem to know Gabriel as a man he had drunk coffee with.

"Can I have the next one, Martha?" He knew she liked to dance with him because Gabriel and Martha dancing together were the same as music and a poem and a thunder-storm on the River. Dancing was—just the two of them, together.

"Sorry," she said. "I promised the next one." Her eyes flitted from Gabriel's eyes to the Forest Warden and down under black eyelashes wide apart and her chin narrow.

Gabriel felt his heart pound; he sensed something black and dreadful, but he had to say: "Well, the one after?"

The Warden was frowning. He led Martha away to the bench.

Gabriel stared after them. His hands tightened. He trembled. The whole room was quiet except for a high little squeak of Albert tuning.

"Martha!" Gabriel said. He meant just to say it, but he shouted.

Footsteps, and a hand above his elbow. "Come on out," said Corporal Brand. People made way for them. "Now look here, Gabriel," Corporal Brand said outside. "You haven't been in one night yet and you start making trouble."

"But I didn't, Corporal. I didn't do nothin'. I asked Martha for a dance."

"Hasn't anyone told you they're getting married next week?"

"No, Corporal. Nobody told me."

"Didn't you see the ring?"

"No, Corporal. I never seen the ring. And I met her in the morning and she never told me."

"She wouldn't tell you," said Corporal Brand. "Listen, Gabriel!" He was not a bad man, perhaps. "You shouted loud enough to bring the place down. You know what you'd've done if I hadn't stopped you."

"Yes, Corporal," said Gabriel. He looked at the grass and shook his head. He knew that the blackness would have had him in another few seconds in there if the Corporal had not come. He could still feel it fading down and out of him.

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"How soon can you get an outfit?"

"Ready to start back, you mean, Corporal?"

The Corporal nodded.

"Two three days, mebbe." Gabriel's head was heavy and his heart was heavy. He was not angry with the Corporal. "I don't wanna' start out that soon."

"That's what you've got to do, though. Keep yourself to yourself. Keep away from the girl. And get going three days from now, or sooner.

"I'm sorry, Gabriel. I thought you might have learned after last time. You're a good trapper and an honest boy, but you don't belong with people. Now, will you do what I say, or will you go in the lock-up?"

"I'll do what you say, Corporal. Good night, Corporal."

Gabriel walked down to his canoe. He did not sleep; he sat all night beside the water. Far away he heard Albert's feverish fiddle, so sweet and so bitter. Near at hand he heard a drip and crumble from the last black chunks of ice. A phoebe sang its wheezy song above the bank. *Phoeeebee*, and another name. Ducks flew low along the river. Gabriel was alone; the cry of the loon was sad.

The dance stopped. It was time for Mass, time to confess a year's small sins, and the sins of a day.

Gabriel did just what the Corporal said. He traded peacefully with Mr. Johnson, and kept away from the people, and got sleep. On the second evening he loaded his canoe, moved it round the point, and he was ready.

He waited now in the underbrush beside a path where the people came and went. There were not many people. They passed here before sleeping. It was after midnight when Martha came. Her eyes were on the path; she smiled to herself in the shadows about something. She was alone.

Gabriel let her go by. He moved nearer to the path and lay quite still in long grass. The flies were bad. He heard her light footsteps again. He jumped upon her from behind, left hand on her mouth, right hand at her waist.

She struggled warmly; tried to bite his hand. She struggled all the way through popple and spruce and down to the river.

"Quiet, Martha," said Gabriel gently, as he put her into the bottom of the canoe.

He pushed off, paddled three strokes. Martha screamed. He struck her hard on the face with his open right hand. She was quiet, huddled. He started his outboard motor, and the noise drowned everything. That single cry could have been the loon.

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Gabriel kept close to the right shore of the Mackenzie. He looked back once after half a mile, but nothing moved at the Post. The river swung right, swung north. The sun had risen; the air was chilly. He took the blanket from under him and put it round Martha, who was sitting against the sun.

"I'm sorry, Martha. I'm real sorry if I hurt you. I never want to hurt you."

She turned to stare at him. He could not see her face well except for the soft curve and the glint of her hair against the light.

"You're crazy," she said. She was afraid of him.

Why were they all, even Martha, afraid of him? Her cheek was red where he had struck her.

"Is lovin' you crazy?"

"Doing this is crazy. They'll get you."

"No," Gabriel said. He laughed very loud seeing her close there before him. He was suddenly happy. "I'll tell you why—because they'll never guess where we're going; and they'll never find us."

Then all that night as they ran down the great river, which was not lonely, he told her about the country they were going to. It was among the hills of his mother's people, where he had lived when he was a boy. But nobody lived now in that far-off country in the Mackenzie Mountains. Nobody had trapped there these fifteen years.

Gabriel spoke strongly, louder as they ran the rapids, which were two miles wide, and the canoe pitched him and Martha in broken water, very small in the vastness—alone with her.

Martha did not turn again. She listened to him or she might have slept. Gabriel did not know. He hoped she was not afraid of him.

"Don't be afraid of me, Martha," he said at the end of his story of the country of his mother's people. She stirred then; so perhaps she did not sleep. Gabriel sang an old dancing song to her while the engine roared on, now ringing near the trees, now flatly alone in the middle of the river.

He turned west away from the sun out of the brown Mackenzie into a green river, and up that river for more hours till they reached the first portage. He made Martha carry a five-gallon drum of gasoline ahead of him each time. It was a woman's load.

He knew she would not run away unless she could steal the canoe; but he slung both his rifles to keep her from temptation. She gave no trouble. Across and back, across and back. It was a long job; Gabriel was strong—a young man in his full strength.

He wondered if Father Tinet would give him absolution in two or three years when they came back to be married and it was all

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forgotten. And he wondered about dogs. That was a big worry before winter.

They climbed the second river. The sun was nearly round again by the time Gabriel stopped. They ate cold food, and he did not dare to make a fire against the flies.

"Go to sleep, Martha," he said. "Don't be afraid. I won't hurt you. I won't touch you." He would never touch her until she wanted him.

She curled up in the blanket and went to sleep. He sat with his back against a tree, dozing on and off. In another hour he would have to wake her. But she was restless. The end of the blanket had come loose, baring her face to the mosquitoes.

He went over and covered her up. She screamed. It was a bad sound in the quiet.

"Don't be afraid, Martha," he pleaded. "I was covering you against the flies. I wouldn't hurt you."

She slept again. As soon as he had woken her, he said: "Take that ring off your finger, Martha. I don't like it."

"No," she said.

He looked at his open hand. "Take it off, Martha," he said again. She took it off and put it somewhere in her bosom.

They travelled all that day and six more days and half the seventh. Gabriel took good care of Martha.

They had been away eight hours by the time the Forest Warden and Martha's father, Joe, brought the alarm to Corporal Brand.

"She wouldn't run off with him, would she?"

"Have a heart," said the Warden. Joe shook his head.

"Where'll he go?" The Corporal was wide awake now, and much annoyed with himself. He felt guilty for not locking that madman up, which made him rough in his manner. "Back to his trapping area?"

"No," said Joe, the breed. He sucked his teeth. "Gotta hunch he'd make for the back country where his mother's people come from. They lived up there when he was a kid." Joe was silent. He had made his contribution. He did not seem disturbed at the disappearance of his daughter.

"Why not his own place in the Franklin?" asked the Warden.

"Because he'd be trapped there between the river and the Barrens," said Corporal Brand as if he had thought of it himself. He had little opinion of the prospective bridegroom. "Where's this country you're talking of, Joe?"

"Up the Green. Portage to the Rickash. Portage to the Rose. Portage to the Bull. That's the start of it. Seven-eight days mebbe. But once he's on Bull Lake . . ." Joe shrugged his shoulders.

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"He told me he'd left his dogs at the Lightning. Would he fetch them first?"

"No," said Joe. "Too much load in canoe."

"O.K.," said Brand. "We'll try as far as the Green anyways. You'll have to guide me, Joe. We'll start in an hour."

"We'd save time on the Mackenzie if we took my scow with the big engine, the twenty-two, and carried the canoe along with us." This was the Warden. What he said made sense.

"All right then," said Corporal Brand. "Meet you down the bank in an hour."—He would rather have gone alone with Joe. But this chap had to come. Brand went in to tell his wife.

"Well, what is it now?" she demanded from bed.

He told her, and she was upset. "That Gabriel," she said. "He's dangerous. Do be careful, Jim."

"Sure," he said. "Sure, I'll be careful. It's all my damn fault for not locking him up." But in the back of his mind he was not so sure about the locking up. That might have made it something worse than plain abduction of a girl, who would marry a soft white youth who would never belong in the North if he stayed a lifetime, and he wouldn't stay.

They reached the Green River portage late that evening. Joe went to look for tracks. He nodded when he came back. "It's them. Half a day old, mebbe."

They left the scow and crossed the portage. They were light. They travelled fast. They had to. Brand knew that for a few days Gabriel's movements would be channelled. But after he reached Bull Lake he could vanish into fifty thousand square miles this side and that side of the Yukon border.

The last portage was hardest—from the Rose over into the Bull, south to north, wooded uphill, bare downhill into the gorge. Gabriel was very tired on the afternoon of the eighth day. But being tired did not matter when he was so happy; and in a few hours now he would have run the Bull into Bull Lake, and he would have twenty valleys to pick and choose from to take Martha away, far away into the country of his mother's people.

He was carrying the canoe on this very last trip, and Martha as usual had a light load. There had been no sound of rifles or outboard motors or men's voices, no smoke to be seen.

"Stop a minute, Martha," he said at the summit.

She stopped. She did everything he told her to do. She gave him no trouble.

His breath came back soon. "I never had company in the bush since I grew up," he said. "Only with you, Martha."

She smiled. It was the first time. And Gabriel thought:

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Is she liking it with me already? "Do you like it with me, Martha?" he asked. But she did not answer.

They started down. There might be a mile to go on the bare hillside. They had gone hardly any distance when the shouts came from above. Men shouting. It was funny. Here they had been running away for days now, and Gabriel had never expected that. Somehow he didn't think much about being chased. He thought all the time about taking Martha to the new land, the old country.

He swung and tilted the canoe so he could look. Three men. "Stop!" He knew the Corporal's voice. So it was the Corporal shouting. The moment Gabriel heard his voice he knew he had to run.

"Go on, Martha," he said. She hesitated. He poked her hard in the back with the canoe. She ran on in front of him on the steep path down a gully between rocks. It was difficult, and the stones were sharp.

The warning bullets cracked overhead. *They'll shoot Martha*, Gabriel thought. *They'll shoot her.* Poor Gabriel understood about the woods and the beasts, but he did not understand about people.

"Stop, Martha!" he shouted. "Lie down, Martha!" She stopped and crouched. He had put down the canoe. Martha's lovely face was frightened. "Get in there!" he said, pushing her roughly into a cleft. "Keep down!" She kept down. She was quite safe.

Gabriel put the barrel of his rifle round a rock. The range would be three hundred yards. The three men still stood on the skyline. Gabriel aimed at the other big man who was not the Corporal. "I'll teach you," he said. "I'll teach you to fire at us when I never fired at you." He squeezed his trigger. The shot echoed all up and round and in and out of the hills; but it was a near miss, splattering rock dust just beside the man.

Forest Warden, Gabriel thought, when the three men had disappeared like magic. He saw the Warden and Martha dance together and dance away and spin three times with eyes together and dance away around the circle and meet again and dance together. He hated the Warden. He did not hate the Corporal much.

He did not hate Joe, Martha's father at, all. But they had tried to hurt Martha and they could watch out for themselves. They would all be shot dead, and then he would go on with Martha to the country of his mother's people.

"Gabriel! If you shoot at them, they'll kill you. Whyn't you give up now and they won't do you no harm?"

Gabriel laughed loud. He was still happy and hating as well. "Don't you tell me what I'm to do, Martha."

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After that there was a long silence except for Martha's light breathing and Gabriel's breathing, and the tumble of the Bull far down below.

"Gabriel!" The Corporal's voice was much nearer. He must have crawled on his belly.

"Yes, Corporal?" Gabriel replied.

"I'll give you a chance. Put your hands above your head and come out."

"And leave Martha to that man? No, Corporal!" He was just going to fire at the place where he thought the Corporal was lying when Martha climbed out of her cleft of rock and stood up.

"Get down, Martha!" cried Gabriel. "Down!" They would shoot her. She paid no attention to him.

"Corporal!" she called. "Corporal Brand!"

"Yes?"

"Corporal, I'm goin' with Gabriel."

There was dead silence for a minute. Then a terrible flow of profanity from the Corporal. "Well, I'll be blankety-blank had for a mug by a blank woman after seven days on the trail." Then, in a less violent voice, "Sure, Martha? You know what he's like?"

"I know what he's like! Good-hearted is what he's like—"

"Well, you'll have to ask your father," he shouted tamely.

"Come down, Corporal," Gabriel called. "Not the Warden, though, not unless he wants a bullet." Gabriel felt all confused except about that. Martha stood quiet and demure.

Joe and the Corporal came down. Joe grunted it was all right whatever his daughter decided.

So Gabriel and Martha went down in the evening to the Bull River, and they ran the Bull into Bull Lake, which was the beginning of that country.

"Gabriel, my son. Have you prayed to Our Heavenly Father for peace of mind?" asked Father Tinet when they came the next year for marriage, and the christening of their first-born.

"Every day, Father," Gabriel said hopefully, and not unmindful of how difficult Martha could be.

But in the end his prayers were answered. Gabriel found peace with Martha and their children in that harsh country which was the country of his mother's people.

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★SCIENCE FICTION CHOICE

LODESTAR

Impatiently, he paced the room, he could hardly wait for her to come

by WILLIAM L. BADE

THERE was a thump. Maitland stirred, came half awake, and opened his eyes. The room was dark except where a broad shaft of moonlight from the open window fell on the foot of his bed. Outside, the residential section of the Reservation slept silently under the pale illumination of the full moon. He guessed sleepily that it was about three o'clock.

What had he heard? He had a definite impression that the sound had come from within the room. It had sounded like someone stumbling into a chair, or—Something moved in the darkness on the other side of the room. Maitland started to sit up, and it was as though a thousand volts had shorted through his brain . . .

This time, he awoke more normally. He opened his eyes, looked through the window at a section of azure sky, and listened to the singing of birds somewhere outside. A beautiful day. In the middle of stretching his rested muscles, arms extended back, legs tensed, he froze, looking up—for the first time really seeing the ceiling. He turned his head, then rolled off the bed, wide awake.

This wasn't his room!

The lawn outside wasn't part of the Reservation! Where the labs and the shops should have been, there was deep prairie grass, a green ocean pushed into waves by the breeze, stretching to the horizon. This wasn't the California desert! Down the hill, where the liquid oxygen plant ought to have been, a river wound across the scene, almost hidden beneath its leafy roof of ancient trees.

Shock contracted Bob Maitland's diaphragm and spread through his body. His breathing quickened. *Now* he remembered what had happened during the night, the sound in the darkness, the dimly seen figure, and then—what? Blackout . . .

Where was he? Who had brought him here? For what purpose?

He thought he knew the answer to the last of those questions. As a member of the original atomic-reaction-motor team, he

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possessed information that other military powers would very much like to obtain. It was absolutely incredible that anyone had managed to abduct him from the heavily guarded confines of the Reservation, yet someone had done it. How?

He pivoted to inspect the room. Even before his eyes could take in the details, he had the impression that there was something wrong about it. To begin with, the style was unfamiliar. There were no straight lines or sharp corners anywhere. The walls were panelled in featureless blue plastic, and the doors were smooth surfaces of metal, half-ellipses, without knobs.

He moved over to study the nearer one. At the right of this one, at about waist level, a push button projected out of the wall. He pressed it; the door slid aside and disappeared. Maitland glanced in at the disclosed bathroom, then went over to look at the other door. There was no button beside this one, nor any other visible means of causing it to open.

Baffled, he turned again and looked at the large open window—and realized what it was that had made the room seem so queer.

It did not look like a gaol cell. There were no bars . . .

Striding across the room, he lunged forward to peer out and violently banged his forehead. He staggered back, grimacing with pain, then reached forward cautious fingers and discovered a hard sheet of stuff so transparent that he had not even suspected its presence. Not glass! Glass was never this clear or strong. A plastic, no doubt, but one he hadn't heard of. Security sometimes had disadvantages.

He looked out at the peaceful vista of river and prairie. The character of the sunlight seemed to indicate that it was afternoon. He became aware that he was hungry. Where the devil could this place be? And what was in store for him here?

He stood trembling, acutely conscious that he was afraid and helpless, until a flicker of motion at the bottom of the hill near the river drew his attention. Pressing his nose against the window, he strained his eyes to see what it was.

A man and a woman were coming towards him up the hill. Evidently they had been swimming, for each had a towel; the man's was hung around his neck, and the woman was still drying her bobbed black hair.

As they came closer, he saw that both of them had dark, uniform suntans and showed striking muscular development, like people who had trained for years with weights. They vanished below his field of view, presumably into the building. He sat down on the edge of the bed and glared helplessly at the floor.

About half an hour later, the door he couldn't open slid aside into the wall. The man Maitland had seen outside, now clad in

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grey trunks and sandals, stood looking in at him across the threshold. Maitland stood up and stared back, conscious suddenly that in his rumpled pyjamas he made an unimpressive figure.

The fellow looked about forty-five. The first details Maitland noticed were the forehead, which was quite broad, and the calm, clear eyes. The dark hair, white at the temples, was combed back, still damp from swimming. Below, there was a wide mouth and a firm, rounded chin. Somehow, the face didn't go with the rest of him. The man had the head of a thinker, the body of a trained athlete—an unusual combination.

Impassively, the man said, " My name is Swarts. You want to know where you are. I am not going to tell you." He had an accent—European, but otherwise unidentifiable. Maitland opened his mouth to protest, but Swarts went on, " However, you're free to do all the guessing you want." There was no suggestion of a smile.

" Now, these are the rules. You'll be here for about a week. You'll have three meals a day, served in this room. You will not be allowed to leave it except when accompanied by myself. You will not be harmed in any way, provided you co-operate. And you can forget the silly idea that we want your childish secrets about rocket-motors." Maitland's heart jumped. " My reason for bringing you here is different. I want to give you some psychological tests . . ."

" Are you crazy ? " Maitland asked quietly. " Do you realize that at this moment one of the greatest hunts in history must be going on ? I'll admit I'm baffled as to where we are and how you got me here—but it seems to me that you could have found someone less conspicuous to give your test to."

Briefly, then, Swarts did smile. " They won't find you," he said. " Now, come with me."

After that outlandish cell, Swarts's laboratory looked rather commonplace. There was something like an operating table in the centre, and a bench along one wall supported several electronics cabinets. A couple of them had cathode-ray tube screens, and they all presented a normal complement of meters, pilot lights, and switches. Cables from them ran across the ceiling and came to a focus above the high, flat table in the centre of the room.

" Lie down," Swarts said. When Maitland hesitated, Swarts added, " Understand one thing—the more you co-operate, the easier things will be for you. If necessary, I shall use coercion. I can get all my results against your will, if I must. I should prefer not to. Please don't make me."

" What's the idea ? " Maitland asked. " What is all this ? "

Swarts hesitated, though not, Maitland felt, to evade an answer, but to find the proper words. " You can think of it as a lie detector.

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These instruments will record your reactions to the tests I give you. That is as much as you need to know. Now lie down."

Maitland stood there for a moment, deliberately relaxing his tensed muscles. "Make me."

If Swarts was irritated, he didn't show it. "That was the first test," he said. "Let me put it another way. I should appreciate it a lot if you'd lie down. I should like to test my apparatus."

Maitland shook his head stubbornly.

"I see," Swarts said. "You want to find out what you're up against."

He moved so fast that Maitland couldn't block the blow. It was to the solar plexus, just hard enough to double him up, fighting for breath. He felt an arm under his back, another behind his knees. Then he was on the table. When he was able to breathe again, there were straps across his chest, hips, knees, ankles, and arms, and Swarts was tightening a clamp that held his head immovable.

Presently, a number of tiny electrodes were adhering to his temples and to other portions of his body, and a minute microphone was clinging to the skin over his heart. These devices terminated in cables that hung from the ceiling. A sphygmomanometer sleeve was wrapped tightly around his left upper arm, its rubber tube trailing to a small black box clamped to the frame of the operating table. Another cable left the box and joined the others.

So—Maitland thought—Swarts could record changes in his skin, heartbeat, and blood pressure: the involuntary responses of the body to stimuli. The question was, what were the stimuli to be? "Your name," said Swarts, "is Robert Lee Maitland. You are thirty-four years old. You are an engineer. Your home town is Madison, Wisconsin . . ."

"You seem to know everything about me," Maitland said defiantly. "Why this recital?"

"I do not know everything about you—yet. And I'm testing the equipment, calibrating it to your reactions." He went on, "Your favourite recreations are chess and reading what you term 'science fiction.' Maitland, *how would you like to go to the moon?*"

Something eager leaped in Maitland's breast at the abrupt question, and he tried to turn his head. Then he forced himself to relax. "What do you mean?"

Swarts chuckled. "I really hit a semantic push button there, didn't I? Maitland, I brought you here because you're a man who wants to go to the moon. I'm interested in finding out *why*."

In the evening a girl brought Maitland his meal. As the door slid aside, he automatically stood up, and they stared at each other.

She had the high cheekbones and almond eyes of an Oriental,

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skin that glowed like gold in the evening light, yet thick, coiled braids of blonde hair that glittered like polished brass. Shorts and a sleeveless blouse of some thick, reddish, metallic-looking fabric clung to her body, and over that she was wearing a white, ankle-length cloak. She was looking at him with palpable curiosity and something like expectancy. Maitland sighed and said, "Hullo," then glanced down self-consciously at his wrinkled green pyjamas.

She smiled, put the tray of food on the table, and swept out, her cloak billowing behind her. Maitland remained standing, staring at the closed door for a minute after she was gone.

Later, when he had finished the steak and corn-on-the-cob and shredded carrots, and a feeling of warm well-being was diffusing from his stomach to his extremities, he sat down on the bed to watch the sunset and to think.

There were three questions for which he required answers before he could formulate any plan or policy. Where was he? Who was Swarts? What was the purpose of these "tests?"

It might be better to tackle the first question first. He looked at the sun, a red spheroid already halfway below the horizon, and tried to think of a region that had this kind-of-terrain. That prairie out there was unique. Almost anywhere in the world, land like that would be cultivated, not allowed to go to grass.

This might be somewhere in Africa . . .

He shook his head, puzzled. The sun disappeared, and its blood-hued glow began to fade from the sky. Maitland sat there, trying to get hold of the problem from an angle where it wouldn't just slip away. After a while the western sky became a screen of clear, luminous blue, a backdrop for a pure white brilliant star. As always at that sight, Maitland felt his worry drain away, leaving an almost mystical sense of peace and an indefinable longing.

Venus, the most beautiful of the planets.

Maitland kept track of them all in their majestic paths through the constellations, but Venus was his favourite. Time and time again he had watched its steady climb higher and higher in the western sky, its transient rule there as evening star, its progression toward the horizon, and loved it equally in its *alter ego* of morning star. Venus was an old friend. An old friend . . .

Something icy settled on the back of his neck, ran down his spine, and diffused into his body. He stared at the planet unbelievingly, fists clenched, forgetting to breathe.

Last night Venus hadn't been there.

Venus was a morning star just now . . .

Just now! He realized the truth in that moment.

Later, when the planet had set and the stars were out, he lay

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on the bed, still warm with excitement and relief. He needn't worry any more about military secrets or who Swarts was. Those questions were irrelevant now. And now he could accept the psychological tests at their face value; most likely, they were what they purported to be.

Only one question of importance remained: what year was this? He grimaced in the darkness, an involuntary muscular expression of jubilation and excitement. The future! Here was the opportunity for the greatest adventure imaginable to twentieth-century man.

Somewhere out there under the stars there must be grand glittering cities and busy spaceports, roaring gateways to the planets. Somewhere out there in the night there must be men who had walked beside the Martian canals and pierced the shining cloud mantle of Venus—somewhere, perhaps, men who had visited the distant, luring stars and returned. Surely, a civilization that had developed time travel could reach the stars!

And *he* had a chance to become a part of all that! He could spend his life among the planets, a citizen of deep space, a voyager of the challenging spaceways between the solar worlds.

"I'm adaptable," he told himself gleefully. "I can learn fast. There'll be a job for me out there . . ."

If—

Suddenly sobered, he rolled over, put his feet on the floor and sat in the darkness, thinking. Tomorrow he would have to find a way of breaking down Swarts's reticence. He would have to make the man realize that secrecy wasn't necessary in this case. And if Swarts still wouldn't talk, he would have to find a way of forcing the issue. The fellow had said that he didn't need co-operation to get his results, but—

After a while Maitland smiled to himself and went back to bed.

He woke in the morning to find someone gently shaking his shoulder. He rolled over and looked up at the girl who had brought him his meal the evening before. There was a tray on the table, and he sniffed the smell of bacon.

The girl smiled at him. She was dressed as before, except that she had discarded the white cloak. As he swung his legs to the floor, she started towards the door, carrying the tray with the dirty dishes from yesterday. He stopped her with a question.

She turned, and he thought there was something eager in her face.

"Do you speak my language?"

"Yes," hesitantly. She lingered too long on the hiss of the last consonant.

"What year is this?" he asked, watching her face intently.

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She laughed, a mellow peal of mirth that had nothing forced about it. She turned towards the door again and said over her shoulder, "You will have to ask Swarts. I cannot tell you."

"Wait! You mean you don't know?"

She shook her head. "I cannot tell you."

"All right; we'll let it go at that."

She smiled at him again as the door slid shut. Swarts came half an hour later, and Maitland began his planned offensive.

"What year is this?" Swarts's steely eyes locked with his. "You know what the date is," he stated.

"No, I don't. Not since yesterday."

"Come on," Swarts said patiently, "let's get going. We have a lot to get through this morning."

"I *know* this isn't 1953. It's probably not even the twentieth century. Venus was a morning star before you brought me here. Now it's an evening star."

"Never mind that. Come."

Wordlessly, Maitland climbed to his feet; preceded Swarts to the laboratory, lay down, and allowed him to fasten the straps and attach the intruments, making no resistance at all. When Swarts started saying a list of words—doubtlessly some sort of semantic reaction test—Maitland began the job of integrating $csc^8x\ dx$ in his head. It was a calculation which required great concentration and frequent tracing back of steps.

After several minutes he noticed that Swarts had stopped calling words. He opened his eyes to find the other man standing over him, looking somewhat exasperated and a little baffled.

"What year is this?" Maitland asked in a conversational tone.

"We'll try another series of tests."

It took Swarts nearly twenty minutes to set up the new apparatus. He lowered a bulky affair with two cylindrical tubes like the twin stacks of a binocular microscope over Maitland's head, so that the lenses at the ends of the tubes were about half an inch from the engineer's eyes. He attached tiny clamps to Maitland's eyelashes.

"These will keep you from holding your eyes shut," he said. "You can blink, but the springs are too strong for you to hold your eyelids down against the tension."

He inserted button earphones into Maitland's ears—

And then the show began.

He was looking at a door in a partly darkened room, and there were footsteps outside, a peremptory knocking. The door flew open, and outlined against the light of the hall he saw a man with a twelve-gauge shotgun. The man shouted, "Now I've got you, you wife-stealer!" He swung the shotgun round and pulled the

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trigger. There was a terrible blast of sound and the flash of smokeless powder—then blackness.

With a deliberate effort Maitland unclenched his fists and tried to slow his breathing. Some kind of emotional reaction test—what was the countermove? He closed his eyes, but the muscles around them declared excruciatingly that they couldn't keep that up.

Now he was looking at a girl. She . . . Maitland gritted his teeth and fought to use his brain; then he had it.

He thought of a fat slob of a bully who had beaten him up one day after school. He remembered a talk he had heard by a politician who had all the intelligent, social responsibility of a rogue gorilla, but no more. He brooded over the damnable stupidity and short-sightedness of Swarts in standing by his silly rules and not telling him about this new world.

Within a minute he was in an ungovernable rage. His muscles tightened against the restraining straps. He panted, sweat came out on his forehead, and he began to curse. Swarts! How he hated . . .

The scene was suddenly a flock of sheep spread over a green hillside. There was blood hammering in Maitland's temples. His face felt hot and he writhed against the restraint of the straps.

The scene disappeared, the lenses of the projector retreated from his eyes, and Swarts was standing over him, white-lipped. Maitland swore at him for a few seconds, then relaxed and smiled weakly. His head was starting to ache from the effort of blinking.

"What year is this?" he asked.

"All right," Swarts said. "A.D. 2634."

Maitland's smile became a grin.

"I really haven't the time to waste talking irrelevancies," Swarts said a while later. "Honestly, Maitland, I'm working against a time-limit. If you'll co-operate, I'll tell Ching to answer your questions."

"Ching?"

"Ingrid Ching is the girl who has been bringing you your meals."

Maitland considered a moment, then nodded. Swarts lowered the projector to his eyes again, and this time the engineer did not resist.

That evening he could hardly wait for her to come. Too excited to sit and watch the sunset, he paced interminably about the room, sometimes whistling nervously, snapping his fingers, sitting down and tapping his foot. After a while he noticed that he was whistling the same theme over and over; a minute's thought identified it as that exuberant mounting phrase which recurs in the finale of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*.

He forgot about it and went on whistling. He was picturing

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himself aboard a ship dropping in towards Mars, making planetfall at Syrtis Major; he was seeing visions of Venus and the awesome beauty of Saturn. In his mind, he circled the moon and viewed the earth as a huge, bright globe against the constellations . . .

Finally the door slid aside and she appeared, carrying the usual tray. She smiled at him, making dimples in her golden skin and revealing perfect teeth. She put the tray on the table.

"I think you are wonderful," she laughed. "You get everything you want, even from Swarts, and I have not been able to get even a little of what I want from him. I want to travel in time, go back to your twentieth century. And I wanted to talk with you, and he would not let me." She laughed again, hands on her rounded hips. "I have never seen him so irritated as he was this afternoon."

Maitland urged her into the chair and sat down on the edge of the bed. Eagerly he asked, "Why the devil do you want to go to the twentieth century? Believe me, I've been there, and what I've seen of this world looks a lot better."

She shrugged. "Swarts says that I want to go back to the Dark Age of Technology because I have not adapted well to modern culture. Myself, I think I just have a romantic nature. Far times and places look more exciting . . ."

"How do you mean—" Maitland wrinkled his brow—"adapt to modern culture? Don't tell me *you're* from another time!"

"Oh, no! But my home is Aresund, a little fishing village at the head of a fiord in what you would call Norway. So far north, we are much behind the times. We live in the old way, from the sea, speak the old tongue."

He looked at her golden features, such a felicitous blend of Oriental and European characteristics, and hesitantly asked, "Maybe I shouldn't . . . This is a little personal, but . . . you don't look altogether like the Norwegians of my time."

His fear that she would be offended proved to be completely unjustified. She merely laughed and said, "There has been much history since 1953. Five hundred years ago. Today you could not find anywhere a 'pure' European. There is only one race now. No more masters or slaves. There are robot factories and farms."

They were both silent for a moment.

Maitland asked, "What means of transportation? Do you have interstellar flight yet?"

"Inter-what?"

"Have men visited the stars?"

She shook her head, bewildered.

"I always thought that would be a tough problem to crack," he agreed. "But tell me about what men are doing in the solar

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system. How is life on Mars and Venus, and how long does it take to get to those places?"

He waited, expectantly silent, but she only looked puzzled. "I don't understand. What are mars?"

After several seconds, Maitland swallowed. Something seemed to be the matter with his throat, making it difficult for him to speak. "Surely you have space travel?"

She frowned and shook her head. "What does that mean—space travel?"

He was gripping the edge of the bed now, glaring at her. "A civilization that could discover time travel and build robot factories wouldn't find it hard to send a ship to Mars!"

"Oh, you mean the planet! Why, I suppose you could use something like a *vliegvlotter*. But why would anyone want to do a thing like that?"

He was on his feet, towering over her, fists clenched. She raised her arms as if to shield her face if he should hit her. "Let's get this perfectly clear," he said, more harshly than he realized. "So far as you know, no one has ever visited the planets and no one wants to. Is that right?"

She nodded. "I have never heard of its being done."

He sank down on the bed and put his face in his hands. After a while he looked up and said bitterly, "You're looking at a man who would give his life to get to Mars. I thought I should in my time. I was positive I should when I knew I was in your time. And now I know I never shall."

The bed creaked beside him, and he felt a soft arm about his shoulders, and fingers delicately stroking his brow. Presently he opened his eyes and looked at her. "I just don't understand," he said. "It seemed obvious to me that whenever men were able to reach the planets, they'd do it."

Her pitying eyes were on his face. He hitched himself around so that he was facing her. "I've got to understand. I've got to know *why*. Why don't men want the planets any more?"

"Honestly," she said, "I did not know they ever had." She hesitated. "Maybe you are asking the wrong question."

He furrowed his brow, bewildered.

"I mean," she explained, "maybe you should ask why people in the twentieth century *did* want to go to worlds men are not suited to inhabit."

Maitland felt his face become hot. "Men can go anywhere, if they want to badly enough."

"But why?"

Despite his sudden irrational anger towards her, Maitland tried to stick to logic. "There's still the adventure of the thing. Surely,

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somewhere there must be men who still feel that . . . Ingrid, doesn't it fire something in your blood, the idea of going to Mars—just to go there and see what's there and walk under a new sky and a smaller sun? Aren't you interested in finding out what the canals are? Or what's under the clouds of Venus? Wouldn't you like to see the rings of Saturn from a distance of only two hundred thousand miles?" His hands were trembling as he stopped.

She shrugged her shapely shoulders. "Go into the past—yes! But go out there? I still cannot see why."

"Has the spirit of adventure *evaporated* from the human race, or what?"

She smiled. "In a room downstairs there is the head of a lion. Swarts killed the beast when he was a young man. He used a spear. And time travelling is the greatest adventure there is. At least, that is the way I feel. Listen, Bob." She laid a hand on his arm. "You grew up in the Age of Technology. Everybody was terribly excited about what could be done with machines—machines to blow up a city all at once, or fly round the world, or take a man to Mars. We have had our fill of—what is the word?—gadgets. Our machines serve us, and so long as they work, we are satisfied to forget about them.

"Because this is the Age of *Man*. We are terribly interested in what can be done with people. Our scientists, like Swarts, are studying human rather than nuclear reactions. We are much more fascinated by the life and death of cultures than by the expansion or contraction of the universe. With us, it is the people that are important, not gadgets."

Maitland looked up at the girl, who was regarding him with troubled eyes. "I think I'd like to be alone for a while," he said.

In the morning, Maitland was tired, though not particularly depressed. He hadn't slept much, but he had come to a decision. When Ingrid woke him, he gave her a cavalier smile and a cheery "Good morning," and sat down to the eggs and ham she had brought. Then, before she could leave, he asked, "Last night when we were talking about spaceships, you mentioned some kind of vessel or vehicle. What was it?"

She thought. "*Vliegvlotter?* Was that it?"

He nodded emphatically. "Tell me about them."

"Well, they are—cars, you might say, with wheels that retract into the body when you take off. They can do five thousand miles an hour in the ionosphere, fifty miles up."

"Fifty miles," Maitland mused. "Then they're sealed, so the air doesn't leak out?" Ingrid nodded. "How do they work? Rocket drive?"

"No." She plucked at her underlip. "I do not understand

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it very well. You could picture something that hooks into a gravity field, and pulls. A long way from the earth it would not work very well because the field is so thin there . . ."

"That's all I need." Maitland licked his lips and frowned. "On that point, anyway. Another thing—Swarts told me I'd be here for about a week. Is there any set procedure involved in that? Have other people been brought to this period from the past?"

She laughed. "Thousands. Swarts has published nearly a hundred case-studies himself, and spent years in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."

Maitland interrupted incredulously. "How on earth could he ever manage to keep that many disappearances quiet? Some of those people would be bound to talk."

She shook her head definitely. "The technique was designed to avoid just that. There is a method of 'fading' the memories people have of their stay here. The episode is always accepted as a period of amnesia, in the absence of a better explanation."

"Still, in thousands of cases . . ."

"Spread out over centuries in a total population of billions."

He laughed. "You're right. But will that be done to me?"

"I suppose so. I can't imagine Swarts letting you take your memories back with you."

Maitland looked out of the window at the green horizon. "We'll see," he said.

Maitland removed his three-day beard with an effective depilatory cream he discovered in the bathroom, and settled down to wait. When Swarts arrived, he said quietly, "Sit down, please. I have to talk with you."

Swarts gave him the look of a man with a piece of equipment that just won't work properly, and remained standing. "What is it now?"

"Look," Maitland said, "Ingrid has told me that men never reached the planets. *You* ought to know how I feel about space flight. It's my whole life. Knowing that my work on rockets is going to result only in the delivery of bombs, I don't want to go back to the twentieth century. I want to stay here."

Swarts said slowly, "That's impossible."

"Now, look, if you want me to co-operate . . ."

The big man made an impatient gesture. "Not impossible because of me. Physically impossible. Impossible because of the way time travel works."

Maitland stared at him suspiciously.

"To displace a mass from its proper time takes energy," Swarts explained, "and it's one of the oldest general physical principles

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that higher energy states are unstable with respect to lower ones. Are you familiar with elementary quantum theory? As an analogy, you might regard yourself, displaced from your proper time, as an atom in an excited state. The system is bound to drop back to ground state. In the atomic case, the time that elapses before that transition occurs is a matter of probabilities. In the case of time travel, it just depends on the amount of mass and the number of years the mass is displaced.

"In short, the laws of nature will insist on your returning to 1953 in just a few days."

Maitland looked at the floor for a while, and his shoulders sagged.

"Your memories of this will be faded," Swarts said. "You'll forget about what Ingrid has told you—forget you were ever here, and take up your life where you left off. You were happy working on rockets, weren't you?"

"But—" Maitland shook his head despairingly. Then he had an idea. "Will you let me do one thing before I go back? I realize that our time is limited, and you have a lot of tests to give me, but I'm willing to help speed things up.

"I want to see the stars, just once, from deep space. I know you'll make me forget it ever happened, but once in my life . . . You have vessels—*vliegvlotter*, Ingrid called them—that can go into space. If you'd give me just a couple of days to go out there, maybe circle the moon . . .?" There was a pleading note in his voice, but he didn't care.

Swarts regarded him dispassionately for a moment, then nodded. "All right," he said. "Now, let's get to work."

"The earth doesn't change much," Maitland mused. The room was full of evening sunlight, and in that illumination Ingrid was more beautiful than any other woman he could remember. This had been the last day of tests; tomorrow, Swarts had promised, he could begin his heart-breakingly brief argosy to the moon, with Ingrid as pilot.

Over the past four days he had been with the girl a lot. In the beginning, he realized, she had been drawn to him as a symbol of an era she longed to know, but was unable to visit. Now she understood him better, knew more about him—and Maitland felt that she liked him for himself.

She had told him of her childhood in backward Aresund and of her loneliness here.

She had confided her dream of visiting far times and places, then had finished, "I doubt that Swarts will ever let me go back. He thinks I am too irresponsible. Probably he is right. But it is

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terribly discouraging. Sometimes I think the best thing for me would be to go home to the fiord . . ."

Now, sitting in the sunset glow, Maitland was in a philosophic mood. "The colour of grass, the twilight, the seasons, the stars—those things haven't changed." He gestured out of the window at the slumbering evening prairie. "That scene, save for unessentials, could just as well be 1953—or 953. It's only human institutions that change rapidly . . ."

"I'll be awfully sorry when you go back," she sighed. "You're the only person I've met here that I can talk to."

"Talk to," he repeated, dissatisfied. "You're the finest girl I've ever met."

He kissed her playfully, but when they separated there was nothing playful about it. Her face was flushed and he was breathing faster than he had been.

Savagely, he bit the inside of his cheek. "Two days! A lifetime here wouldn't be long enough!"

"Bob." She touched his arm, and her lips were trembling. "Bob, must you go—out there? We could get a couple of horses tomorrow, and we should have two days."

He leaned back and shook his head. "Can't you see, Ingrid? This is my only chance. If I don't go tomorrow, I'll never get to the moon. And then my whole life won't mean anything . . ."

He woke with Ingrid shaking him. "Bob! Bob!" Her voice was an urgent whisper. "You've got to wake up quickly, Bob!"

He sat up and brushed the hair out of his eyes. "What's the matter?"

"I didn't really believe that Swarts would let you go into space. It wasn't like him. Bob, he fooled you. *Today* is when your time runs out!"

Maitland swallowed hard, and his chest muscles tightened convulsively. "You mean it was all a trick?"

She nodded. "He told me just now, while he was putting something in your milk to make you sleep." Her face was bitter and resentful. "He said, 'This is a lesson for you, Ching, if you ever do any work with individuals like this. You have to humour them, tell them anything they want to believe, in order to get your data.'"

Maitland put his feet on the floor and stood up. His face was white and he was breathing fast.

She grasped his arm. "What are you going to do?"

He shook her hand off. "I may not get to the moon, but I'm going to teach one superman the advantage of honesty!"

"Wait! That won't get you anywhere."

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"He may be bigger than I am," Maitland gritted, "but—"

She squeezed his arm violently. "You don't understand. He would not fight you. He'd use a gun."

"If I could catch him by surprise . . ."

She took hold of his shoulders firmly. "Now, listen, Bob Maitland. I love you. And I think it's the most important thing in the world that you get to the stars. Swarts will never let me time travel, anyway."

"What are you thinking?"

"I'll go down to the village and get a *vliegvlotter*. It won't take twenty minutes. I'll come back, see that Swarts is out of the way, let you out of here, and take you—" she hesitated, but her eyes were steady—"wherever you want to go."

He was trembling. "Your career. I can't let you . . ."

She grinned. "My career! It's time I went home to the fiord, anyway. Now you wait here!"

The *vliegvlotter* was about fifty feet long, an ellipsoid of revolution. Maitland and Ingrid ran hand in hand across the lawn, and she pushed him up through the door, then slammed it shut and screwed the pressure locks tight.

They were strapping themselves into the seats, bathed in sunlight that flooded down through the thick plastic canopy, when she stopped, pale with consternation.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

"Oh, Bob, I forgot! We can't do this!"

"We're going to," he said grimly.

"Bob, *some time this morning you're going to snap back to* 1953. If that happens while we're up there . . ."

His jaw went slack as he realized the implication. Then he reached over and finished fastening the buckle on her seat belt.

"Bob, I can't. I would be killing you just as surely as . . ."

"Never mind that. You can tell me how to run this thing and then get out, if you want to."

She reached slowly forward, pressed a switch, and took hold of the wheel. Seconds later they were plummeting into the blue dome of the sky.

The blue became darker, purplish, and stars appeared in daylight. Maitland gripped the edge of the seat; somewhere inside him it seemed that a chorus of angels was singing the finale of Beethoven's *Ninth*.

There was a *ping*, and Ingrid automatically flicked a switch. A screen lit up and the image of Swarts was looking at them. His eyes betrayed some unfamiliar emotion, awe or fear. "Come back at once. Don't you realize that—"

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"Sorry, Swarts." Maitland's voice resounded with triumph. "You'll just have to humour me once more."

"Maitland! Don't you know that you're going to snap back to the twentieth century in half an hour? You'll be in space with no protection. You'll . . . disintegrate!"

"I know," Maitland said. He looked up through the viewport. "Right now I'm seeing the stars as I've never seen them before. Sorry to make you lose a case, Swarts, but this is better than dying of pneumonia or an atomic bomb."

He reached forward and switched off the image.

Twenty minutes later, Maitland made Ingrid slow down and turn the ship so that he could see the earth. It was there, a huge, shining globe against the constellations, ten thousand miles distant, one hundred times the size of familiar Luna. North America was directly below, part of Canada, covered with a dazzling area of clouds. The polar ice-cap was visible in its entirety, along with the northern portions of the Eurasian land mass. The line of darkness cut off part of Alaska and bisected the Pacific Ocean, and the sun's reflection in the Atlantic was blinding.

And there was Venus, a brilliant white jewel against the starry blackness of interstellar space; and now he could see the sun's corona.

The ship was rotating slowly, and presently the moon, at first quarter, came into view, not perceptibly larger than seen from earth. Maitland heaved a sigh of regret. If only this could have been the beginning of a voyage . . .

Ingrid touched his arm. "Bob."

He turned to look at her golden beauty.

"Bob, give me one more kiss."

He loosened his seat strap and put his arms around her. For a moment he felt her soft lips on his . . .

Then she was gone, and the ship had vanished. For perhaps as long as a second, alone in space, he was looking with naked, unprotected, ambition-sated eyes at the distant stars.

The luring white blaze of Venus was the last image he took with him into the night without stars.

* * *

WHAT'S AMISS?

> Everything that has made life interesting, beyond the primal interest, and dangerous in excess of the earliest peril, has been man's addition to life. Women are innocent of all but the simplest and most abiding faults . . .
>
> ERIC LINKLATER, *A Year of Space*

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PRICE OF SILENCE

They could hear his feet climbing up and up, slowly, up and up

by RAY BRADBURY

ALL night Mrs. Navarrez moaned, and the sounds that she made filled the tenement like a light turned on in every room so that no one could sleep. All night she gnashed her white pillow and wrung her thin hands and cried, "My Joe!"

The tenement people at three o'clock, finally discouraged that she would ever shut her painted red mouth, rose feeling warm and gritty, and dressed to take the trolley-bus downtown to an all-night movie. There cowboys chased bad men through veils of stale smoke and spoke dialogue above the soft snorings in the dark all-night theatre.

By dawn, Mrs. Navarrez was still sobbing and screaming.

During the day it was not so bad. Then the babies crying here or there in the house added the saving grace of what was almost a harmony. There was also the chugging thunder of the washing-machines on the tenement porch, and chenille-robed women standing on the flooded, soggy boards of the porch talking rapidly away at their Mexican gossip.

But, now and again, above the shrill talk, the washing, the babies, one could hear Mrs. Navarrez like a wireless tuned high. "My Joe, my poor Joe!" she screamed.

Now, at twilight, the men arrived with the sweat of their work under their arms. Lolling in cool tubs all through the cooking tenement, they cursed and pressed their fists to their ears.

"Is she *still* at it?" They raged helplessly at each other. One man even kicked her door. "Shut up, woman!" he cried. But this only made Mrs. Navarrez shriek louder. "Oh, ah, Joe, Joe!"

"You would think Joe was the only man in the world to be taken into the Army," said the men to their wives. "Tonight we eat out!"

All through the house, kitchen utensils were put back on the shelves and doors locked as husbands hurried their perfumed women down the halls by their pale elbows.

Mr. Villanazul, unlocking his flaking door at midnight, closed his brown eyes, and stood for a moment, swaying. His wife, Tina,

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stood beside him with their three sons and two daughters, one in arms.

They entered their dim little room and he looked at the blue candlelight flickering under the lonely crucifix. They lay in their beds like burning barbecues, the summer night basting them with their own liquors. The house burned with that ill woman's cry.

"I am stifled!" said Mr. Villanazul, and Mr. Villanazul fled through the tenement down the stairs to the front porch with his wife, leaving the children who had the great and miraculous talent of sleeping through all disasters.

There were dim figures on the front porch, at least a dozen men crouched with cigarettes fuming and glowing in their brown fingers, women in chenille wrappers taking the summer-night wind, what there was of it.

They moved like dream figures, like clothes-dummies worked stiffly on wires and rollers. Their eyes were puffed and their tongues thick.

"Let us go to her room and strangle her," said one of the men.

"No, that would be wrong," said a woman. "Let us throw her from a window."

Everyone laughed tiredly.

"It's been a week now since her husband went in the Army," someone put in, irritably. "What an actress she is, what a tragedy! Mrs. Navarrez, pah!"

"Something must be done." Mr. Villanazul had spoken. He was startled at the hard firmness of his own voice. Everyone looked at him.

"We can't go on another night," Mr. Villanazul continued, bluntly.

"The more we pound her door the more she cries," explained Mr. Gomez.

"The priest came this afternoon," said Mrs. Gutierrez. "We sent for him in desperation. But Mrs. Navarrez would not even let him in the door, no matter how he pleaded. The priest went away. We had Officer Gilvie yell at her, too; but do you think she listened?"

"We must try some other way, then," mused Mr. Villanazul. "Someone must be—sympathetic—with her."

"What other way is there?" asked Mr. Gomez.

"If only . . ." Mr. Villanazul considered his thoughts for a few moments. "If only there was a *single* man among us."

He dropped that like a cold stone into a deep well. He let the splash occur, the ripples move gently out.

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Everybody sighed. It was like a little summer-night wind risen.

"But," said Mr. Gomez, sinking back. "We are all married. There is no single man here."

"Oh," said everyone, and settled down into the hot length of the night.

"Then," Mr. Villanazul shot back, lifting his shoulders, making his mouth a firm line, "it must be one of *us*!"

Again the night wind blew, stirring the people in awe.

"This is no time for selfishness," declared Villanazul. "One of us must do this thing. That or roast in hell another night, and another, *and* another!"

Now the people on the porch separated away from him, blinking. They backed away and left him standing alone and they looked at him. "*You* will do it, of course, Mr. Villanazul?" someone asked.

He stiffened. The cigarette almost fell from his fingers. "Oh, but I . . ." he objected.

He waved his hands feverishly. "I have a wife and five children, one in arms!"

—"But *none* of us are single, and it is your idea and you must have the courage of your convictions, Mr. Villanazul!" everyone said, one way or another.

Mr. Villanazul was very frightened and silent. He glanced with startled flashes of his eyes at his wife.

She stood wearily swaying on the night air, trying to squint, trying to make him out, trying to see him.

"I'm so *tired*," she sighed.

"Tina," he said.

"I shall die if I do not sleep," she said.

"Oh, but Tina," he protested.

"I shall die and there will be many flowers and I shall be buried if I do not get some rest," she murmured, eyes shut.

"She looks very bad," said everyone.

Mr. Villanazul hesitated only a minute longer. Then he reached out and took hold of his wife's slack hot fingers. He touched her cheek with his hand and it was hot, too. He said something. Then he brushed her cheek with his lips.

Without a word, he walked across the porch and vanished into the hall.

They could hear his feet climbing the unlit stairs of the tenement, up and up, slowly, up and up to the third floor where Mrs. Navarrez wailed and screamed.

They waited, lifting their heads, turning them sideways to listen. They waited on the porch. The men lit new cigarettes and flicked

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away the matches, talking in spurts, quickly, between the listenings.

The women wandered among the men, all of them came and talked to Mrs. Villanazul who stood, lines under her tired eyes, leaning against a porch rail.

"Ssst!" cried someone. "Listen. Listen!"

Everybody quieted.

"Now," said one of the men, in a low whisper, "Mr. Villanazul is at the top of the house."

Everyone bent forward.

"Now," hissed the man in his stage whisper, "Mr. Villanazul taps at her door."

Everyone held their breath. And yes, there it was, a tiny bird-like rapping.

"Now Mrs. Navarrez, at this new intrusion, breaks out with new crying!"

At the top of the house came a scream.

"Now," Mr. Gomez crouched, eyes squinted, his hand delicately weaving on the air, imagining it, "Mr. Villanazul pleads and pleads, softly, quietly, to the locked door."

The people on the porch lifted their chins, tentatively, trying to see through three flights of wood and plaster to the third floor, waiting.

"What is he saying to her?"

"Who knows? Who knows? Listen."

They waited five minutes.

"He talks on and on to her."

The screaming slackened.

"Ah."

A minute later the screaming slowed and filtered away.

"Now, Mr. Villanazul talks swift, he pleads, he whispers, and he promises, to the silent door," said Mr. Gomez softly.

The screaming was now a sobbing, and the sobbing changed to a moan, and finally it died out and away and was gone.

The people waited. After two minutes of standing, sweating, frozen, everyone on the porch heard that door far away upstairs cautiously rattle its lock, pause, open, and, a minute later, close.

The house was silent.

Silence lived in every room like a light turned off. Silence flowed like a good black wine in the tunnel halls. Silence breathed from the open casements like a cool draught from the cellar. They all stood inhaling the coolness of it.

"Ah," they sighed.

Men tossed away cigarettes and walked on tiptoe into the silent tenement, their women following. Soon the porch was empty.

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They walked in the cool halls of quiet. Mrs. Villanazul, in a drugged stupor, unlocked her door.

"We must give Mr. Villanazul a dinner."

"Light a candle for him tomorrow."

The doors shut. In her fresh bed, Mrs. Villanazul lay alone. "He is a thoughtful man," she dreamed, eyes shut. "For such things, I love him."

The silence was like a cool hand, stroking her to sleep.

* * *

ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD

PRIZE-WINNERS OF CROSSWORD NO. 3

We are pleased to announce the three winners of Argosy's third Prize Crossword Competition:

Miss Vivien Crossley, Thornhill Crescent, Lofting Road, London, N.1.
C. D. Birnie Esq., Maitland Street, Dunfermline, Fife.
Arthur F. Shawyer Esq., Upwey Manor, Weymouth, Dorset.

SOLUTION

Across. 1, *Middlesex*. 6, *Gamp*. 10, *Recap*. 11, *Annapurna*. 12, *Turniptop*. 13, *Madam*. 14, *Competitor*. 16, *Pest*. 18, *Oafs*. 20, *Freemasons*. 23, *Siren*. 24, *Duckboard*. 27, *Officiate*. 28, *Colds*. 29, *Days*. 30, *Expressly*.

Down. 1, *Marat*. 2, *Decorum*. 3, *Lopsided*. 4, *Smart*. 5, *Xenophobe*. 7, *Abridge*. 8, *Playmates*. 9, *Spume*. 14, *Crossroad*. 15, *Irradiate*. 17, *Barbecue*. 19, *Firefly*. 21, *Oracles*. 22, *Knock*. 25, *Cheap*. 26, *Dusty*.

PRIZE CROSSWORD NO. 6

Argosy's sixth Prize Crossword Competition appears on page 144. There will be one-guinea book tokens for the first three correct solutions checked on the closing date. Entries should be completed *in ink*, and posted to: ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD (No. 6), 3, Pilgrim Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.) to arrive by Monday, November 9th, the closing date.

We regret that entry must be limited to readers living in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and Eire. There is no entry fee and the Editor's decision is final.

Names of the prize-winners in this competition and the solution will appear in the issue of Argosy on sale January 9th.

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PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION

We invite you to a private view

Portrait : A Young Girl

Her frock was of straw-coloured jaconet muslin, cut low at the bosom and short at the ankle, so as to display her *demi-broquins* of Regency violet, crossing with many straps upon a yellow cobweb stocking . . . The dress was drawn up so as to mould the contour of both breasts, and in the nook between a cairngorm brooch maintained it. Here, too, surely in a very enviable position, trembled the nose-gay of primroses.

She wore on her shoulders . . . a French coat of sarsenet, tied in front with Margate braces, and of the same colour with her violet shoes. About her face clustered a disorder of dark ringlets, a little garland of yellow French roses surmounted her brow, and the whole was crowned by a village hat of chipped straw . . . She glowed like an open flower—girl and raiment, and the cairngorm that caught the daylight and returned it in a fiery flash, and the threads of bronze and gold that played in her hair.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, *Weir of Hermiston*

Charcoal Drawing : Spring Sowing

Behold the ponderous, melancholy rook,
blessing with ragged glove
and pious look
the field he means to plunder.
See how responsibly the jackdaws move
from row to row
with pauses for reflection,
like sidesmen taking up a good collection . . .

EISDELL TUCKER, *Spring Sowing*

Study in Oils : Cottage Interior

Five children were sitting at the tea-table, but a special place had been reserved for Mr. Shillingford, and the young people were walled off from it by a loaf, a large pot of blackberry jam, and a dish of home-made cakes.

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" Us be all in a muck, same as ever, master," said Mrs. Smerdon genially: " but you won't mind that. ' Childer come first,' as granny says, ' for they'll have to do the work of the world when we'em past it . . .'

" Our tea be thin after yours, I reckon; but you'll take us as you find us, I'm sure," declared the mistress of Bone Hill. " Of a Sunday, when I can, I put in a bit more; but when the home be holding ten mouths, and often twelve to sixteen, along o' goings and comings, us have got to count the tea-leaves, I do assure 'e."

The children were regarding the dish of cakes, and their round eyes sought their mothers . . .

" Put a couple on your plate, master; then us'll give 'em the rest, and let 'em run off."

" I shan't want one," answered Gabriel.

The children had their cakes and departed . . . He looked at the window, where darkness gathered, and Martha understood him.

" You be finding it a thought stuffy in here, my dear? And so it is; but us have to keep the chamber emetically sealed for gran'mother. If a blast of fresh air reaches to her tubes, she coughs her soul up."

" Lives on peat smoke, you might almost say—my wife's mother do," said Peter Smerdon. " For five years she've bided in that chimbley corner, and only crawled out now and again of a summer noon . . ."

The physical and mental atmosphere of the Smerdons began to make Gabriel pant . . . He desired heartily to be gone.

EDEN PHILLPOTTS, *Widecombe Fair*

Pastel: Seascape

The pale grey sea crawls stealthily
Up the pale lilac of the beach;
A bluer grey, the waters reach
To where the horizon ends the sea.

Flushed with the tinge of dusky rose,
The clouds, a twilit lavender,
Flood the low sky, and duskier
The mist comes flooding in, and flows

Into the twilight of the land,
And darkness, coming softly down,
Rustles across the fading sand
And folds its arms about the town.

ARTHUR SYMONS, *Twilight*

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Problem Picture : Bull In Field

The most useless thing, a bull among flowers, and lovely.
The flowers that were everything but crowing made a lively
net over the grass and under the faded edge of train-fume,
and Persian on the worn field clinked their subtle glasses.
I stretched a piece of blue around them. In the blue frame
the bull on two legs looked over his shoulders

into a field I put a red frame round, where railways
ran to a centre ; the nutmeg engines screamed always
and dirtied the brown sky with smoke spits but their wheels
hissed round on the glass rails again the leash of steam.
I in corduroys in the south-west corner wangled through rolls
of barbed wire and walked kicking up a pollen fume

under the faded edge of the train-smudge, and the prison
of blue pulled out the puffing bull to a tawny lozenge
with hawthorn horns in which squeaked a ball of linnets . . .

NORMAN MCCAIG

Landscape : Winter Morning

Snow upon the ground . . . All looked cheerful and bright. Helm Crag rose very bold and craggy, a Being by itself, and behind it was the large ridge of mountain, smooth as marble and snow white. All the mountains looked like solid stone, on our left, going from Grasmere, *i.e.*, White Moss and Nab Scar. The snow hid all the grass, and all signs of vegetation, and the rocks showed themselves boldly everywhere, and seemed more stony than rock or stone. The birches on the crags beautiful, red brown and glittering. The ashes glittering spears with their upright stems. The hips very beautiful, and so good . . .

DOROTHY WORDSWORTH, *Journal, 12th December*, 1801

Still Life : Fruit Arrangement

While he forth from the closet brought a heap
Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
And lucent syrops, tinct with cinnamon ;
Manna and dates, in argosy transferr'd
From Fez ; and spiced dainties, every one,
From silken Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon . . .

JOHN KEATS, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, 1819

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HEADS OR TAILS

Mr. Bellairs, that brilliant all-rounder, had been born with an open mind

by NOEL BLAKISTON

THE Rev. James Bellairs was not good at making up his mind, but there was one subject about which he was quite certain—those pilasters. "The place might be a hospital," he said.

And Candle church was worthy of better treatment. Architecturally it was indeed something out of the ordinary. Was there another classical church in the diocese? When Candle hall had been rebuilt in the middle of the eighteenth century and the brick wall of the huge kitchen garden had been extended to the edge of the churchyard, it had seemed to Sir George Gascoigne that the job would not be finished until his private chapel and the mausoleum of his family, otherwise Candle parish church, was also rebuilt in a style worthy of the age. Hence the round-headed windows, the cornice, the stone swags, and, on each side of the chancel arch, a pilaster with a Corinthian capital. Mr. Bellairs' predecessor, Mr. Dewhurst, had had these pilasters painted a laurel green in shiny enamel paint.

The Dewhursts—and Mrs. Dewhurst had been the moving spirit in these matters—had been people of taste; in Mr. Bellairs' opinion, execrable taste. They had felt it bad luck, when there were so many fine churches around them in which you breathed the genuine intimate religious atmosphere of the Middle Ages, that they should have been landed with this chilly secular monstrosity.

They, Mrs. Dewhurst that is, had set about making it more tolerable. A liberal coating of the green paint on any surface that would take it was a great improvement and already gave a feeling of warmth. But there were some features that would not take paint. What was to be done with those two ghastly marble tombs in the sanctuary?

There they lay, recumbent on their elbows like Romans at a feast, the father and the uncle of Sir George Gascoigne, with their bursting stomachs and their full-bottomed wigs, gross, complacent and carnal, on either side of the altar. The virtues of Sir Eustace Gascoigne and Frederick Gascoigne, esquire, J.P., were catalogued

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beneath them on wavy scrolls unfolded by podgy cherubs. Surely nobody had ever appeared at heaven's gate with such decisive credentials? "Keep the change," one can hear them saying as St. Peter looks incredulously at the absurdly excessive entrance fee they have put into his hand.

From the east window a kindly but unimpressive God the Father looked down over a cloud. He also was evidently a Gascoigne, but not an important one, a younger brother, no doubt, who had gone into the church. So small was the church that you felt the fingers of the two elder brothers would touch as they stretched over towards each other across the altar.

"I can almost feel them breathing on me when I am officiating," Mr. Dewhurst had said.

The only thing to do with these atrocities, in Mrs. Dewhurst's opinion, was to hide them from view. (Luckily there were no living Gascoignes to bother about. They had left the place years ago and the hall had been pulled down.) It was found that a brass curtain rail could be clamped across the top of each of the monuments.

Mrs. Dewhurst herself made the curtains. They were of a fluffy woollen material, coloured magenta, on which she had embroidered the "lilies of the field" in various bright wools. The herbaceous border in the vicarage garden had been the model for this gay frieze. Along the top, with the heads of delphiniums and hollyhocks coming up between the letters, were written, in angular Gothic characters, on one curtain "They toil not," and on the other "Neither do they spin."

Embroidery was not the only craft which Mrs. Dewhurst practised. She worked artistically in brass, leather, and cork. Also she was a painter. She had converted the Gascoigne box pew into a children's corner and on the wall above hung two of her canvases depicting, with a wealth of sentiment, imaginary episodes in the childhood of Our Lord.

Both Mrs. Dewhurst's curtains and her pictures were popular with the parishioners. But the new vicar, though he expressed no criticism of the works themselves, had an irresistible desire to see what the church would look like without them. He had the curtains taken down and "sent away to be cleaned." There they stayed. The two Falstaffs were exposed from behind the arras, breathing heavily. The mottoes, thought Mr. Bellairs, might have remained. They toil not . . .

As to the pictures, he pointed out to the churchwardens and the schoolmistress that the children would actually see more of them if they were moved into the school. How about trying it for a while as an experiment?

Mr. Bellairs then turned his attention to the green paint. He

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decided to do the repainting himself. Why not? He liked painting. But meeting a parishioner one morning, who looked surprised to see his vicar carrying a ladder and a tin of paint along the churchyard path, he felt that some explanation was needed. "Six days shalt thou labour," he said with a cheerful smile. Was that what he had meant to say, he asked himself as he passed the man.

So there he was, halfway up the ladder painting a pilaster. He was painting it cream and intended to pick out the foliage of the capital with gold. Being alone in the church, or rather, alone with his Maker in the church—for, as he had said in his sermon last Sunday, there is no such thing as being alone—he was able to whistle at his work without causing any offence. For he did not have to stand on ceremony with his Maker. They were on the best of terms.

Suddenly one of those thoughts came into his head which make us feel surrounded by supernatural beings trying to attract our attention as they have something interesting to tell us. One of these beings caught Mr. Bellairs' eye, and said, "Go and look in the question box."

The question box was a little oak receptacle which Mr. Bellairs had had fitted next to the offertory box near the west door. In it he had asked that his parishioners should drop on a slip of paper any questions of a religious nature that might perplex them and he would try to answer them in a sermon. The idea was entirely his own. Being himself of a disputatious turn of mind, he had looked forward to the exchange of a lively bombardment between himself and his parishioners.

The results had been disappointing. He had been at Candle nearly two years now and there had been only two questions. They had both, in Mr. Bellairs' opinion, been uninteresting, if thorny. One was "Are we the Lost Tribes?" the other "Who were the parents of Cain's wife?" These tiresome questions had come in the first week. There had been no others.

He had given up looking in the box. It had of course been a mistake to hope for much of a response from his simple rustic flock. "Because you had a double first, you must not expect us all to be brainy," his bishop had once said to him, charmingly associating himself with the brainless. That was dear old Horrocks, by the way, not this new man . . .

Coming down the ladder Mr. Bellairs went to the question box. There, sure enough, was an untidy bit of paper on which was written in the hand of one evidently not accustomed to the use of a pen, "Who was the better man, Jacob or Esau?"

A good one? The vicar's first feeling was that this again was an

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uninteresting question. They were just trying to catch him out. Well, the first thing to do was to refresh his memory.

He went to the lectern and opened the Bible. Here we are—Isaac prayeth for Rebekah being barren, the children strive in her womb, birth of Esau and Jacob. "And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint." Mr. Bellairs read the two stories, how Esau sold his birthright for a pottage of lentils, and how Jacob stole their father's blessing, and how Esau forgave his younger brother both these ugly tricks. "And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him: and they wept." There is something grand and magnanimous about Esau. In his indifference to his own welfare, his unsuspiciousness, his sportsmanship, he stands out. If it were not for the emotional quality of that reconciliation, you might almost suppose him one of us, almost English.

Jacob or Esau? Esau, every time, cries the heart. Which, of course, is wrong, Mr. Bellairs heard himself telling his congregation. Esau may appear the more charming character, but just to be charming is not enough. The important thing is to be on the right side.

It is not even enough to love God. The important thing is that God should love you. For he does not love all equally. He does not distribute his blessing on all. "Hast thou but one blessing, my father?" Yes. "Bless me, even me also, O my father."

No. If you are too late, you are too late. You have been outwitted. You should trust no one, not even your brother. Hold tight to what you have. To him that hath shall be given. If you start letting go, you will lose everything. Nothing succeeds like success. At least, it seems so. But the argument stuck in Mr. Bellairs' throat. For he was not a success, and he knew it. And all because he could not make up his mind.

The defect dated from his birth. He simply was not born either a little Liberal or else a little Conservative. He was born with an open mind. He kept an open house for ideas and opinions. None had the least difficulty in entering—or in slipping out again. Which had served him very well at school and the university. The teachers had never had such a responsive pupil or one who played up to them with such delightful bravado.

"It does not matter which side you take," the history tutor had said. "The examiner does not mind in the least whether you are Cavalier or Roundhead. What he does mind is that you should present your case clearly and as though you believed in it."

What fun they used to have, Bellairs and his friends, the other bright boys! The things they could appear to believe in! They knew all about making the worse appear the better cause, and the

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ablest of them all, abler even than Reeves or Buckley, was Bellairs. It amused him sometimes to keep not only the master but himself guessing what side he was taking. For with skill one could refrain from showing one's hand till an essay was at least halfway through.

The educational period over, the boys stood together looking at the battle of life. At what exact moment his friends left his side Mr. Bellairs could not have said, but there presently he saw their heads bobbing up in the mêlée. They had been quick to show that they could take sides, assume responsibilities, champion causes, lead their fellow men, and make careers for themselves which would bring them, while they were still on the right side of forty-five, to positions of distinction, Barker to be an Under-Secretary, Buckley an Archdeacon, Reeves a knight.

How did they manage it? How did they make the decisions? How, Mr. Bellairs asked himself, did they know that their decisions were going to be the right ones? For, of course, the decisions now had to be the right ones. It was no longer a case of "It does not matter which side you take." For the actual well-being of living people was now involved. They did not surely toss a coin in the old manner, and enter the fray for the fun of the thing? Sir Roderick Reeves for the fun of the thing? It could not be.

When your contemporaries begin to receive knighthoods, it is time to take stock of your own achievements, and Mr. Bellairs, that brilliant all-rounder, at forty-four was the vicar of tiny far-off Candle.

James Bellairs, you are a disappointment. So, every now and then, when he could remember, he would remind himself that he was a failure. So one says to a child, "You may be feeling perfectly well, but remember, you *have* got German measles." For he did not feel ill. His malady was neither painful, nor was it new. For he had not changed. It was they who had changed. They had become public while he remained private, utterly, incorrigibly, blissfully private.

He was back on the ladder, painting. How good the paint smelled. I wonder, he asked himself, do middle-aged men leaning against the chimney-piece in London clubs say, "Of course, that was Bellairs' year. Bellairs was stroke that year" or "Do you remember that night Jimmy Bellairs climbed into Jesus?"

Jacob or Esau, now which was it to be? The question was certainly not one with an easy ready-made answer. Even a less flexible mind than his own would have to give it some thought. Flexible, flexible—inflexible—how did the words go, on that Gascoigne monument? "Inflexible to himself—" What was after that?

He came down the ladder and went up into the chancel to

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read the scroll beneath Frederick Gascoigne, Esquire, J.P. About halfway down—yes—" Merciful to others, inflexible only towards himself, amiable to his equals, indulgent to his inferiors—" from there he had it pat.

Presumably it was George Gascoigne who had composed these decent eulogies to his father and uncle. I wonder, thought Mr. Bellairs, what sort of a scroll Bob will write for me, when my time comes? He chuckled at the thought. It was strange how little anxiety that incredible moment caused him as it came steadily nearer. Perhaps, he sometimes told himself, reprehensibly little, for one in his position.

He returned to the ladder. Esau or Jacob? The more one thought of it, the more there was to it. In fact, it was a rattling good question. Who could have asked it? The writing was the writing of Esau, but the wording was the wording of Jacob. There was something about that expression, the better man, which did not seem quite to belong to the child or the unlettered countryman who seemed to have penned the question. But who could it be?

" Hullo, Bob! "

His son had come silently into the church and was standing at the foot of the ladder.

" It's tea-time, father. We are having it on the lawn."

Bob was just seventeen.

" Tea already! I've hardly done anything this afternoon."

Mr. Bellairs came down the ladder.

" Look at that."

He took the paper with the question out of his pocket and showed it to Bob, who looked at it as for the first time.

" A good question," said the boy.

" Yes. Which side would you take? "

" Jacob," said Bob, to Mr. Bellairs', and, it must be admitted, to Bob's own, surprise.

Mr. Bellairs answered with a defence of Esau. They strolled out of the church and back along the churchyard path arguing, and throughout tea Bob made the best case he could for the " Jacob type " against the " Esau type," though he felt that he would have been even more fluent on the other side.

Mrs. Bellairs watched and listened. He will be just like his father, she said to herself with love and pride.

* * *

A psychiatrist's advice to an elderly and highly-strung lady addicted to shop-lifting : " Madam, you should take things more quietly."

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CALL OF THE SEA

Something was always just beyond the invisible horizon

by BARTIMEUS

WHEN we were young, there lay on the nursery mantelpiece a sea-shell. Looking back on it, I suppose it had been jettisoned there by some far-travelled uncle. There was in its iridescent curves something exotic, something suggesting a coral strand and coconut palms bowed by the trade winds.

That is what it would recall to me today; but to us children it came from the very shores of "faery lands forlorn." Our nurse would hold it to our ears and say that you could hear in it the sound of the sea. We believed her, but to me it seemed as if the sea had many voices. It never spoke twice in the same tone, and this I suspect is part of its eternal spell.

We had a cousin, a stoutish fellow addicted to button boots who, when the shell was pressed against his ear, vowed that he could hear nothing. I realize now that he stood for an enormous number of people to whom the sea is nothing more than an uneasy volume of water covering—I forget exactly what proportion—the major area of the globe. And for the life of me I do not know if they—these folk whose ears are stopped—are to be pitied or envied.

It is not easy to enumerate these voices: to each one of us to whom it was given to hear them they said something different: I am speaking now of the real sea and of youth.

As only children can hear the sound of the sea in the shell, so only youth can hear the call. Sometimes its bondage continues into old age: but old men find it hard to remember what once held them in its witchery. "The heave and the halt and the howl and the crash of the comber wind hounded."

They look at it over the bridge-rail as a landsman might stare at Rodin's statue of the aged harlot . . .

"Youth and the sea!" ejaculated Conrad's Marlow. "Glamour and the sea! The good, strong sea, the salt, bitter sea, that could whisper to you and roar at you and knock your breath out of you." That was as near to it as he could get after a lifetime afloat.

"Glamour . . ." of what? Of exile, hardship, vigils? Where is

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the glamour of an unending struggle with an adversary that can never be propitiated, who day and night in fair weather and foul watches you for one instant's drowsiness, for some human weakness to betray you, for the "error of judgment" that plays into her hands at last?

I was once shipmate with a man—a navigator—who hated the sea because he was perpetually aware of these things. It was stamped upon his face, so that he was known as "Old Frosty." His conversation, as often as not, was a perpetual growl against the sea. He was like a galley-slave chained to his oar, snarling at the overseer over his whip-scarred shoulder. Yet something, call it what you will, kept him at sea for many years, for all he and his wife loved each other. He was nearly always slightly seasick. This was an extreme case, but I have known many in similar bondage to a rather lesser degree.

"Glamour . . . ?" One could understand something of that when men sailed west, and, after passing the Azores, every landfall was unknown. They believed in the existence of mountains of gold, of lands peopled with two-headed giants who hoarded jewels beyond all avarice, of trees with gold and silver foliage. That must have been glamour enough of its sort to compensate for the overcrowding of their ships, the unspeakable food, the scurvy, the vermin, and the brutal discipline. But the call continued, long after these things were known to be chimera, long after there were no more unknown landfalls.

Glamour? So it seemed to me once, and I recall some words I wrote long ago after sighting Jamaica one day at dawn. It was in all my experience of the sea, the supreme landfall.

A belt of inky-black cloud lay all along the edge of the horizon, broken into tumultuous outlines against a sky of pale lemon-yellow. It suggested a barbaric triumph—a procession of chariots and plunging horses, gods and banners and herded captives, streaming along the edge of a dark purple sea.

Ahead towered a range of mountains into a sky that had passed from lemon to pale turquoise. They were of a sullen and lonely majesty, with no more colour than a toad's back; their valleys were filled with mist. And then, on a sudden, the edges of the cloud frieze were suddenly alight with flame.

The mists flushed rose-pink and gold. Shafts of sunlight burst through weak places in the cloud barrier, painting sweeps of emerald green over the mountain slopes; colour and light poured into the universe as if a dam had given way. In that moment, it seemed as if at last I had found what it was that I had gone to sea in search of.

But the sun rose, the hot enervating West Indian sun . . . The vision faded.

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Evanescent! That is the quality of glamour. Its very essence. "What went ye out for to see?" might be the question every seaman asks of himself, to find at the end of all his voyaging, after all his watching "under the arched white sails of ships," no answer.

"Something," he would say, "that was always just beneath the horizon." Tropic scents? Ah, there his eye lights momentarily. "Once," he will tell you, perhaps, "going up the Yangtse, the wind was downstream from Hankow. Hankow where they pressed the tea into bricks that caravans traded to Tibet. A warm, damp wind it was, and we were lying on deck in the darkness.

"The scent of the tea brought all the romance of China, forbidden cities, queer stringed instruments, flower-girls with bound feet, and orange blossoms in their black, sleek hair, jade and joss-sticks, slit-eyed, paunchy gods smiling merrily in temples with curly roofs . . . and us lying there on mats in the dark, listening to the bows parting the current with a swis-s-sh like a sob or a sigh, or maybe both . . ."

All just fantasy, you see. Something that, when you tried to grasp it, slipped through the fingers like water.

Once, for a couple of years, I served in the "drafting" office of a big naval depot. It was my task to detail men awaiting their turn for sea. There was a card index of all men in that particular port division—it was Chatham, actually—and the cards of men who volunteered for sea out of their turn were marked with little blue metal tabs—they projected above the level of the cards so that they later could be found easily. You would think that two years at that job would supply all the words the sea said when she called men. But it didn't.

I always asked them. The ones who answered were the ones who wanted to escape from "the traps their own weakness had sprung for them," to evade some situation ashore that had become intolerable; who held the belief, a common one, that the eternal laws of cause and effect stopped short at the ten-fathom line: that somewhere beyond the horizon they would escape from themselves. They had plenty to say, and none of it had to do with the call of the sea.

But the others, the younger men—in those days there was no marriage allowance and they had few ties—said little. The dialogue went in this fashion.

"Are you a volunteer for sea?"

"Yessir."

"Foreign Service?"

"Yessir."

"Why?"

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Silence and then a shy half-smile and a movement of the head towards the window, towards the muddy ebb of the Medway, beyond the dockyard, beyond the Nore, beyond the invisible horizon . . .

On went the blue tab. " Carry on."

I wonder what they found beyond those ever-receding horizons.

During the last war I was taking passage in an empty troopship that was torpedoed. She belonged to the P. & O. and was manned by a lascar crew. When we took to the boats they were crowded into them " to capacity," as theatrical people say, each man clasping his possessions in a pitiful little bundle of rags. The boats lay close to each other and when the dawn came we were revealed to one another, the lascars' turbans showing faint blobs of colour, greens and pinks against the heaving, grey, empty sea and the sky.

A young engineer suddenly stood up in the bows of one of the boats and surveyed the lascars' impassive faces, greenish behind the henna-dyed moustaches and beards. Most of them were his stokers. " Well, boys ! " he shouted. "Are you happy in your work?"

In his voice was all the mockery, the disillusionment, the acquiescence of the bondslave. I suppose you could say of the bondage of us all, adrift in little boats upon an implacable sea.

Where were we bound, we bondslaves of an illusion that had led us at last to this ? Hilaire Belloc on Battersea Bridge knew the answer :

We shall not round the granite piers and paven,
To lie to wharves we know with canvas furled ;
My little Boat, we shall not make the haven—
It is not of the world.

* * *

ANSWERS to MASQUERADE on page 27

1. *The wolf, in the fairy tale by Charles Perrault.*
2. *Robin of Bagshot, in "The Beggar's Opera," by John Gay.*
3. *Portia, in " The Merchant of Venice," by William Shakespeare.*
4. *Roger Chillingworth, in " The Scarlet Letter," by Nathaniel Hawthorne.*
5. *Rudolf Rassendyll, in " The Prisoner of Zenda," by Anthony Hope.*
6. *Odysseus, in " The Odyssey," by Homer.*
7. *The Green Knight, Bercilak de Hautdesert, in " Gawain and the Green Knight," by an unknown fourteenth-century poet.*
8. *The Ugly Duckling, in the fairy tale by Hans Andersen.*

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THE HOLLOW MAN

**"I — I killed you in the jungle.
You were dead — I know you were"**

by THOMAS BURKE

HE came up one of the narrow streets which lead from the docks, and turned into a road whose farther end was gay with the lights of London. At the end of this road he went deep into the lights of London, and sometimes into its shadows. Farther and farther he went from the river, and did not pause until he had reached a poor quarter near the centre.

He made a tall, spare figure, clothed in a black mackintosh. Below this could be seen brown dungaree trousers. A peaked cap hid most of his face; the little that was exposed was white and sharp. In the autumn mist that filled the lighted streets as well as the dark he seemed a wraith, and some of those who passed him looked again, not sure whether they had indeed seen a living man. One or two of them moved their shoulders, as though shrinking from something.

His legs were long, but he walked with the short, deliberate steps of a blind man, though he was not blind. His eyes were open, and he stared straight ahead; but he seemed to see nothing and hear nothing.

Neither the mournful hooting of sirens across the black water of the river, nor the genial windows of the shops in the big streets near the centre drew his head to right or left. He walked as though he had no destination in mind, yet constantly, at this corner or that, he turned. It seemed that an unseen hand was guiding him to a given point of whose location he was himself ignorant.

He was searching for a friend of fifteen years ago, and the unseen hand, or some dog-instinct, had led him from Africa to London, and was now leading him, along the last mile of his search, to a certain little eating-house. He did not know that he was going to the eating-house of his friend Nameless, but he did know, from the time he left Africa, that he was journeying towards Nameless, and he now knew that he was very near to Nameless.

Nameless didn't know that his old friend was anywhere near *him*, though, had he observed conditions that evening, he might have wondered why he was sitting up an hour later than usual.

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He was seated in one of the pews of his prosperous Workmen's Dining-Rooms—a little gold-mine his wife's relations called it—and he was smoking and looking at nothing. He had added up the till and written the copies of the bill of fare for next day, and there was nothing to keep him out of bed after his fifteen hours' attention to business. Had he been asked why he was sitting up later than usual, he would first have answered that he didn't know that he was, and would then have explained, in default of any other explanation, that it was for the purpose of having a last pipe.

He was quite unaware that he was sitting up and keeping the door unlatched because a long-parted friend from Africa was seeking him, and needed his services. He was quite unaware that he had left the door unlatched at that late hour—half-past eleven—to admit pain and woe.

But even as many bells sent dolefully across the night from their steeples their disagreement as to the point of half-past-eleven, pain and woe were but two streets away from him. The mackintosh and dungarees and the sharp white face were coming nearer every moment.

There was silence in the house and in the streets; a heavy silence, broken, or sometimes stressed, by the occasional night-noises—motor horns, back-firing of lorries, shunting at a distant terminus. That silence seemed to envelop the house, but he did not notice it. He did not notice the bells, and he did not even notice the lagging step that approached his shop, and passed—and returned—and passed again—and halted. He was aware of nothing save that he was smoking a last pipe, and he was sitting in somnolence, deaf and blind to anything not in his immediate neighbourhood.

But when a hand was laid on the latch, and the latch was lifted, he did hear that, and he looked up. And he saw the door open, and got up and went to it. And there, just within the door, he came face to face with the thin figure of pain and woe.

To kill a fellow-creature is a frightful thing. At the time the act is committed the murderer may have sound and convincing reasons (to him) for his act. But time and reflection may bring regret; even remorse; and this may live with him for many years. Examined in wakeful hours of the night or early morning, the reasons for the act may shed their cold logic, and may cease to be reasons and become mere excuses. And these naked excuses may strip the murderer and show him to himself as he is. They may begin to hunt his soul, and to run into every little corner of his mind and every little nerve, in search of it.

And if to kill a fellow creature and to suffer recurrent regret for an act of heated blood is a frightful thing, it is still more frightful to kill a fellow creature and bury his body deep in an African jungle,

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and then, fifteen years later, at about midnight, to see the latch of your door lifted by the hand you had stilled and to see the man, looking much as he did fifteen years ago, walk into your home and claim your hospitality.

When the man in mackintosh and dungarees walked into the dining-rooms Nameless stood still; stared; staggered against a table; supported himself by a hand, and said, "Oh."

The other man said, "Nameless."

Then they looked at each other; Nameless with head thrust forward, mouth dropped, eyes wide; the visitor with a dull, glazed expression. If Nameless had not been the man he was—thick, bovine, and costive—he would have flung up his arms and screamed. At that moment he felt the need of some such outlet, but did not know how to find it. The only dramatic expression he gave to the situation was to whisper instead of speak.

Twenty emotions came to life in his head and spine, and wrestled there. But they showed themselves only in his staring eyes and his whisper. His first thought, or rather, spasm, was Ghosts—Indigestion—Nervous Breakdown. His second, when he saw that the figure was substantial and real, was Impersonation. But a slight movement on the part of the visitor dismissed that.

It was a little habitual movement which belonged only to that man; an unconscious twitching of the third finger of the left hand. He knew then that it was Gopak. Gopak, a little changed, but still, miraculously, thirty-two. Gopak, alive, breathing, and real. No ghost. No phantom of the stomach. He was as certain of that as he was that fifteen years ago he had killed Gopak stone-dead and buried him.

The blackness of the moment was lightened by Gopak. In thin, flat tones he asked, "May I sit down? I'm tired." He sat down, and said: "So tired."

Nameless still held the table. He whispered: "Gopak . . . Gopak . . . But I—I *killed* you. I killed you in the jungle. You were dead. I know you were."

Gopak passed his hand across his face. He seemed about to cry. "I know you did. I know. That's all I can remember—about this earth. You killed me." The voice became thinner and flatter. "And then they came and—disturbed me. They woke me up. And brought me back." He sat with shoulders sagged, arms drooping, hands hanging between knees. After the first recognition he did not look at Nameless; he looked at the floor.

"Came and disturbed you?" Nameless leaned forward and whispered the words. "Woke you up? Who?"

"The Leopard Men."

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"The what?"

"The Leopard Men." The watery voice said it as casually as if it were saying "the night watchman."

"The Leopard Men?" Nameless stared, and his fat face crinkled in an effort to take in the situation of a midnight visitation from a dead man, and the dead man talking nonsense. He felt his blood moving out of its course. He looked at his own hand to see if it was his own hand. He looked at the table to see if it was his table. The hand and the table were facts, and if the dead man was a fact—and he was—his story might be a fact. It seemed anyway as sensible as the dead man's presence.

He gave a heavy sigh from the stomach. "A-ah . . . The Leopard Men . . . Yes, I heard about them out there. Tales."

Gopak slowly wagged his head. "Not tales. They're real. If they weren't real—I wouldn't be here. Would I?"

Nameless had to admit this. He had heard many tales "out there" about the Leopard Men, and had dismissed them as jungle yarns. But now, it seemed, jungle yarns had become commonplace fact in a little London shop. The watery voice went on.

"They did it. I saw them. I came back in the middle of a circle of them. They killed a native to put his life into me. They wanted a white man—for their farm. So they brought me back. You may not believe it. You wouldn't *want* to believe it. You wouldn't want to—see or know anything like them. And I wouldn't want any man to. But it's true. That's how I'm here."

"But I left you absolutely dead. I made every test. It was three days before I buried you. And I buried you deep."

"I know. But that wouldn't make any difference to them. It was a long time after when they came and brought me back. And I'm still dead, you know. It's only my body they brought back." The voice trailed into a thread. "And I'm so tired."

Sitting in his prosperous eating-house, Nameless was in the presence of an achieved miracle, but the everyday, solid appointments of the eating-house wouldn't let him fully comprehend it. Foolishly, as he realized when he had spoken, he asked Gopak to explain what had happened. Asked a man who couldn't really be alive to explain how he came to be alive. It was like asking Nothing to explain Everything.

Constantly, as he talked, he felt his grasp on his own mind slipping. The surprise of a sudden visitor at a late hour; the shock of the arrival of a long-dead man; and the realization that this long-dead man was not a wraith—were too much for him.

During the next half-hour he found himself talking to Gopak as to the Gopak he had known fifteen years ago when they were partners. Then he would be halted by the freezing knowledge

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that he was talking to a dead man, and that a dead man was faintly answering him. He felt that the thing couldn't really have happened, but in the interchange of talk he kept forgetting the improbable side of it, and accepting it. With each recollection of the truth, his mind would clear and settle in one thought—" I've got to get rid of him. How am I going to get rid of him ? "

" But how did you get here ? "

" I escaped." The words came slowly and thinly, and out of the body rather than the mouth.

" How ? "

" I don't—know. I don't remember anything—except our quarrel. And being at rest."

" But why come all the way here ? Why didn't you stay on the coast ? "

" I don't—know. But you're the only man I know. The only man I can remember."

" But how did you find me ? "

" I don't know. But I had to—find you. You're the only man—who can help me."

" But how can I help you ? "

The head turned weakly from side to side. " I don't know. But nobody else—can."

Nameless stared through the window, looking on to the lamplit street and seeing nothing of it. The everyday being which had been his half an hour ago had been annihilated ; the everyday beliefs and disbeliefs shattered and mixed together. But some shred of his old sense and his old standards remained. He must handle this situation. " Well—what you want to do ? What you going to do ? I don't see how I can help you. And you can't stay here, obviously." A demon of perversity sent a facetious notion into his head—introducing Gopak to his wife—" This is my dead friend."

But on his last spoken remark Gopak made the effort of raising his head and staring with the glazed eyes at Nameless. " But I *must* stay here. There's nowhere else I can stay. I must stay here. That's why I came. You've got to help me."

" But you can't stay here. I got no room. All occupied. Nowhere for you to sleep."

The wan voice said : " That doesn't matter. I *don't* sleep."

" Eh ? "

" I *don't* sleep. I haven't slept since they brought me back. I can sit here—till you can think of some way of helping me."

" But how *can* I ? " He again forgot the background of the situation, and began to get angry at the vision of a dead man sitting about the place waiting for him to think of something. " How *can* I if you don't tell me how ? "

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"I don't—know. But you got to. You killed me. And I was dead—and comfortable. As it all came from you—killing me—you're responsible for me being—like this. So you got to—help me. That's why I—came to you."

"But what do you want me to do?"

"I don't know. I can't—think. But nobody but you can help me. I had to come to you. Something brought me—straight to you. That means that you're the one—that can help me. Now I'm with you, something will—happen to help me. I feel it will. In time you'll—think of something."

Nameless found his legs suddenly weak. He sat down and stared with a sick scowl at the hideous and the incomprehensible. Here was a dead man in his house—a man he had murdered in a moment of black temper—and he knew in his heart that he couldn't turn the man out. For one thing, he would have been afraid to touch him; he couldn't see himself touching him. For another, faced with the miracle of the presence of a fifteen-year-dead man, he doubted whether physical force or any material agency would be effectual in moving the man.

His soul shivered, as all men's souls shiver at the demonstration of forces outside their mental or spiritual horizon. He had murdered this man, and often, in fifteen years, he had repented the act. If the man's appalling story were true, then he had some sort of right to turn to Nameless. Nameless recognized that, and knew that whatever happened he couldn't turn him out. His hot-tempered sin had literally come home to him.

The wan voice broke into his nightmare. "You go to rest, Nameless. I'll sit here. You go to rest." He put his face down to his hands and uttered a little moan. "Oh, why can't I rest?"

Nameless came down early next morning with a half-hope that Gopak would not be there. But he was there, seated where Nameless had left him last night. Nameless made some tea, and showed him where he might wash. He washed listlessly, and crawled back to his seat, and listlessly drank the tea which Nameless brought him.

To his wife and the kitchen helpers Nameless mentioned him as an old friend who had had a bit of a shock. "Shipwrecked and knocked on the head. But quite harmless, and he won't be staying long. He's waiting for admission to a home. A good pal to me in the past, and it's the least I can do to let him stay here for a few days. Suffers from sleeplessness and prefers to sit up at night. Quite harmless."

But Gopak stayed more than a few days. He outstayed everybody. Even when the customers had gone Gopak was still there.

On the first morning of his visit when the regular customers

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came in at mid-day, they looked at the odd, white figure sitting vacantly in the first pew, then stared, then moved away. All avoided the pew in which he sat. Nameless explained him to them, but his explanation did not seem to relieve the slight tension which settled on the dining-room. The atmosphere was not so brisk and chatty as usual. Even those who had their backs to the stranger seemed to be affected by his presence.

At the end of the first day Nameless, noticing this, told him that he had arranged a nice corner of the front room upstairs, where he could sit by the window, and took his arm to take him upstairs. But Gopak feebly shook the hand away, and sat where he was. "No. I don't want to go. I'll stay here. I'll stay here. I don't want to move."

And he wouldn't move. After a few more pleadings Nameless realized with dismay that his refusal was definite; that it would be futile to press him or force him; that he was going to sit in that dining-room for ever. He was as weak as a child and as firm as a rock. He continued to sit in that first pew, and the customers continued to avoid it, and to give queer glances at it. It seemed that they half recognized that he was something more than a fellow who had had a shock.

During the second week of his stay three of the regular customers were missing, and more than one of those that remained made acidly facetious suggestions to Nameless that he park his lively friend somewhere else. He made things too exciting for them; all that whoopee took them off their work, and interfered with digestion. Nameless told them he would be staying only a day or so longer, but they found that this was untrue, and at the end of the second week eight of the regulars had found another place.

Each day, when the dinner-hour came, Nameless tried to get him to take a little walk, but always he refused. He would go out only at night, and then never more than two hundred yards from the shop. For the rest, he sat in his pew, sometimes dozing in the afternoon, at other times staring at the floor. He took his food abstractedly, and never knew whether he had had food or not. He spoke only when questioned, and the burden of his talk was: "I'm so tired."

One thing only seemed to arouse any light of interest in him; one thing only drew his eyes from the floor. That was the seventeen-year-old daughter of his host, who was known as Bubbles, and who helped with the waiting. And Bubbles seemed to be the only member of the shop and its customers who did not shrink from him.

She knew nothing of the truth about him, but she seemed to understand him, and the only response he ever gave to anything was to her childish sympathy. She sat and chatted foolish chatter

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to him—" bringing him out of himself," she called it—and sometimes he would be brought out to the extent of a watery smile. He came to recognize her step, and would look up before she entered the room. Once or twice in the evening, when the shop was empty, and Nameless was sitting miserably with him, he would ask, without lifting his eyes, " Where's Bubbles ? " and would be told that Bubbles had gone to the pictures or was out at a dance, and would relapse into deeper vacancy.

Nameless didn't like this. He was already visited by a curse which, in four weeks, had destroyed most of his business. Regular customers had dropped off two by two, and no new customers came to take their place. Strangers who dropped in once for a meal did not come again ; they could not keep their eyes or their minds off the forbidding, white-faced figure sitting motionless in the first pew. At midday, when the place had been crowded and late-comers had to wait for a seat, it was now two-thirds empty ; only a few of the most thick-skinned remained faithful.

And on top of this there was the interest of the dead man in his daughter, an interest which seemed to be having an unpleasant effect. Nameless hadn't noticed it, but his wife had : " Bubbles don't seem as bright and lively as she was. You noticed it lately ? She's getting quiet—and a bit slack. Sits about a lot. Paler than she used to be."

" Her age, perhaps."

" No. She's not one of these thin dark sort. No—it's something else. Just the last week or two I've noticed it. Off her food. Sits about doing nothing. No interest. May be nothing—just out of sorts, perhaps . . . How much longer's that horrible friend of yours going to stay ? "

The horrible friend stayed some weeks longer—ten weeks in all—while Nameless watched his business drop to nothing and his daughter get pale and peevish. He knew the cause of it. There was no home in all England like his : no home that had a dead man sitting in it for ten weeks. A dead man brought, after a long time, from the grave, to sit and disturb his customers and take the vitality from his daughter.

He couldn't tell this to anybody. Nobody would believe such nonsense. But he *knew* that he was entertaining a dead man, and, knowing that a long-dead man was walking the earth, he could believe in any result of that fact. He could believe almost anything that he would have derided ten weeks ago.

His customers had abandoned his shop, not because of the presence of a silent, white-faced man, but because of the presence of a dead-living man. Their minds might not know it, but their

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blood knew it. And, as his business had been destroyed, so, he believed, would his daughter be destroyed. Her blood was not warning her; her blood told her only that this was a long-ago friend of her father's, and she was drawn to him.

It was at this point that Nameless, having no work to do, began to drink. And it was well that he did so. For out of the drink came an idea, and with that idea he freed himself from the curse upon him and his house.

The shop now served scarcely half a dozen customers at mid-day. It had become ill-kempt and dusty, and the service and the food were bad. Nameless took no trouble to be civil to his few customers. Often, when he was notably under drink, he went to the trouble of being very rude to them. They talked about this. They talked about the decline of his business and the dustiness of the shop and the bad food. They talked about his drinking, and, of course, exaggerated it.

And they talked about the queer fellow who sat there day after day and gave everybody the creeps. A few outsiders, hearing the gossip, came to the dining-rooms to see the queer fellow and the always-tight proprietor; but they did not come again, and there were not enough of the curious to keep the place busy. It went down until it served scarcely two customers a day. And Nameless went down with it into drink.

Then, one evening, out of the drink he fished an inspiration.

He took it downstairs to Gopak, who was sitting in his usual seat, hands hanging, eyes on the floor. "Gopak—listen. You came here because I was the only man who could help you in your trouble. You listening?"

A faint "Yes" was his answer.

"Well, now. You told me I'd got to think of something. I've thought of something . . . Listen. You say I'm responsible for your condition and got to get you out of it, because I killed you. I did. We had a row. You made me wild. You dared me. And what with that sun and the jungle and the insects, I wasn't meself. I killed you. The moment it was done I could 'a cut me right hand off. Because you and me were pals. I could 'a cut me right hand off."

"I know. I felt that directly it was over. I knew you were suffering."

"Ah! . . . I have suffered. And I'm suffering now. Well, this is what I've thought. All your present trouble come from me killing you in that jungle and burying you. An idea came to me. Do you think it would help you—I—if I—if I—killed you again?"

For some seconds Gopak continued to stare at the floor. Then his shoulders moved. Then, while Nameless watched every little

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response to his idea, the watery voice began. "Yes. Yes. That's it. That's what I was waiting for. That's why I came here. I can see now. That's why I had to get here. Nobody else could kill me. Only you. I've got to be killed again. Yes, I see. But nobody else—would be able—to kill me. Only the man who first killed me . . . Yes, you've found—what we're both—waiting for.

"Anybody else could shoot me—stab me—hang me—but they couldn't kill me. Only you. That's why I managed to get here and find you." The watery voice rose to a thin strength. "That's it. And you must do it. Do it now. You don't want to, I know. But you must. You *must*." His head dropped and he stared at the floor. Nameless, too, stared at the floor. He was seeing things. He had murdered a man and had escaped all punishment save that of his own mind, which had been terrible enough. But now he was going to murder him again—not in a jungle but in a city; and he saw the slow points of the result.

He saw the arrest. He saw the first hearing. He saw the trial. He saw the cell. He saw the rope. He shuddered.

Then he saw the alternative—the breakdown of his life—a ruined business, poverty, the poor-house, a daughter robbed of her health and perhaps dying, and always the curse of the dead-living man, who might follow him to the poor-house. Better to end it all, he thought. Rid himself of the curse which Gopak had brought upon him and his family, and then rid his family of himself with a revolver. Better to follow up his idea.

He got stiffly to his feet. The hour was late evening—half-past ten—and the streets were quiet. He had pulled down the shop-blinds and locked the door. The room was lit by one light at the farther end. He moved about uncertainly and looked at Gopak. "Er—how would you—how shall I——"

Gopak said, "You did it with a knife. Just under the heart. You must do it that way again."

Nameless looked at him for some seconds. Then, with an air of resolve, he shook himself. He walked quickly to the kitchen.

Three minutes later his wife and daughter heard a crash, as though a table had been overturned. They called but got no answer. When they came down they found him sitting in one of the pews, wiping sweat from his forehead. He was white and shaking, and appeared to be recovering from a faint.

"Whatever's the matter? You all right?"

He waved them away. "Yes, I'm all right. Touch of giddiness. Smoking too much, I think."

"Mmmm. Or drinking . . . Where's your friend? Out for a walk?"

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"No. He's gone off. Said he wouldn't impose any longer, and 'd go and find an infirmary." He spoke weakly and found trouble in picking words. "Didn't you hear that bang—when he shut the door?"

"I thought that was you fell down."

"No. It was him when he went. I couldn't stop him."

"Mmmm. Just as well, I think." She looked about her. "Things seem to 'a gone all wrong since he's been here."

There was a general air of dustiness about the place. The tablecloths were dirty, not from use but from disuse. The windows were dim. A long knife, very dusty, was lying on the table under the window. In a corner by the door leading to the kitchen, unseen by her, lay a dusty mackintosh and dungarees, which appeared to have been tossed there. But it was over by the main door, near the first pew, that the dust was thickest—a long trail of it—greyish-white dust.

"Reely this place gets more and more slapdash. Just *look* at that dust by the door. Looks as though somebody's been spilling ashes all over the place."

Nameless looked at it, and his hands shook a little. But he answered, more firmly than before: "Yes, I know. I'll have a proper clean-up tomorrow."

For the first time in ten weeks he smiled at them; a thin haggard smile, but a smile.

* * *

REVERSED CHARGE

A certain interest attaches to one of the Admiralty charts of Lemnos on account of the names, seemingly innocent, which it allots to four eminences near Kombi Point on the western shore of Mudros Bay. The names are: YAM HILL, YRROC HILL, EB HILL, DENMAD HILL, and their origin is as follows. At the close of the nineteenth century one of Her Majesty's ships commanded by a certain Corry was sent to Mudros for three weeks, but the stern and conscientious C.O., instead of letting his officers spend their time shooting red-legs, made them do surveying work ashore. They took their revenge by giving these hills names, which, reversed, called down eternal punishment upon the unsuspecting Corry. As they seemed no more outlandish than any other names in those parts their significance was not spotted, so they found their way on to the chart, where they have remained ever since.

SIR HARRY LUKE, *Cities and Men, Vol.* II

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ACTION STATIONS

For bragging-time was over, and fighting-time was come

HENRY NEWBOLT

The XVIIIth daie being S. Lukes day John Hawes rent Mary Pierces peticote and did beate her sister Katherine with a crabtree staffe.

ADAM WINTHROP, *Diary*, 18*th October*, 1595

Night Fighter

" He remarked to me then," said that mildest of men,
" ' If your Snark be a Snark, that is right ;
Fetch it home by all means—you may serve it with greens
And it's handy for striking a light . . .

" ' But oh, beamish nephew, beware of the day,
If your Snark be a Boojum ! For then
You will softly and suddenly vanish away,
And never be met with again ! '

" I engage with the Snark—every night after dark—
In a dreamy delirious fight :
I serve it with greens in those shadowy scenes,
And I use it for striking a light :

" But if ever I meet with a Boojum, that day,
In a moment (of this I am sure),
I shall softly and suddenly vanish away—
And the notion I cannot endure ! "

LEWIS CARROLL, 1832-98
The Hunting of the Snark

Mind Over Matter

John Mytton was as dangerous to others as to himself . . . The strangest exploit, perhaps . . . was the episode of the Nightshirt and the Hiccup. It is better to relate this story in the stately terms of his biographer Nimrod. " You have read that somebody set fire to Troy, Alexander to Persepolis, Nero to Rome, a baker to London, a rascally caliph to the treasures of Alexandria, and the brave Mucius Scaevola to his own hand and arm to frighten the proud

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Lars Porsena into a peace ; but did you ever hear of a man setting fire to his own nightshirt to frighten away the hiccup ? Such, however, is the climax I have alluded to, and this was the manner in which it was performed. ' Damn this hiccup,' said Mytton, as he stood undressed on the floor, apparently in the act of getting into his bed ; ' but I'll frighten it away ; ' so, seizing a lighted candle he applied it to the tab of his shirt and, it being a cotton one, he was instantly enveloped in flames."

In the subsequent mêlée, during which two intrepid gentlemen knocked down and rolled upon the Squire in their attempt to put out the flames, and the flames did their worst against both nightshirt and hiccup, the two gentlemen won, for they tore his shirt from his body piecemeal. As for the hiccup, it was frightened away. " The hiccup is gone, by G—," said the Squire, as, appallingly burnt, he reeled into bed.

The next morning, he greeted his friends with a loud " view-halloo " to show them how he could bear pain.

EDITH SITWELL, *The English Eccentrics*

Battle Royal

" Sir," said Mr. Tupman, " you're a fellow." " Sir," said Mr. Pickwick, " you're another."

CHARLES DICKENS, *Pickwick Papers*

No Quarter

There is a very fair gate as you enter into St. Mark's Place when you come from the Rialto bridge, which is decked with a great deal of fine marble, in which gate are two pretty conceits to be observed, the one at the very top, which is a clock with the images of two wild men by it made in brass . . .

A certain fellow that had the charge to look to the clock was very busy about the bell, according to his usual custom every day, to the end to amend something in it that was amiss. But in the meantime one of those wild men, that at the quarters of the hours do use to strike the bell, strook the man in the head with his brazen hammer, giving him such a violent blow that herewith he fell down dead presently in the Place and never spake more.

THOMAS CORYAT, *Crudities*, 1611

Just Provocation

I am not arguing with you—I am telling you.

Quoted by J. MCNEILL WHISTLER

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Prodigy

William Hackett was so Cruel, Eager, and Insolent, that he bit off his School-Master's Nose, and eat it before his Face . . .

The Great Historical, Geographical and Poetical Dictionary, 1694

Challenge

Have I a wife? Bedam I have!
But we was badly mated:
I hit her a great clout one night,
And now we're separated.

And mornin's going to my work,
I meets her on the quay:
"Good mornin' to ye, ma'am," says I;
"To hell with ye," says she.

L. A. G. STRONG, *Dublin Days*

Truce

After a bit, silence was prayed for Sir Grummore. He stood up and sang his old school song, amidst great applause, but forgot most of it and had to make a humming noise in his moustache. Then King Pellinore was nudged to his feet and sang bashfully:

Oh, Ay was born a Pellinore in famous Lincolnshire.
Full well Ay chased the Questing Beast for more than seventeen year.
Till Ay took up with Sir Grummore here
In the season of the year.
(Since when) 'tis my delight
On a feather-bed night
To sleep at home, my dear.

"You see," explained King Pellinore blushing, as he sat down with everybody whacking him on the back, "old Grummore invited me home, what, after we had been having a splendid joust together, and since then Ay've been letting my beastly Beast go and hang itself on the wall, what?"

"Well done," they all told him. "You live your own life while you've got it."

T. H. WHITE, *The Sword in the Stone*

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DELECTABLE WHISKERS

Their outrageous redness offended her sensibilities

by LESLIE BONNET

IT was in the year 221 AD, in the late winter season of the Little Frosts. A pale sun still shone, blindingly white on the untouched snowy peaks that hemmed the scene, wanly in the deep valleys between them.

In this entangling country General Feng-Shau-shan halted his litter on the summit of the pass of Da Ban-tse. Ahead of him the undulating files of his army bent purposefully along the thin track to the eastward. The colourful captains, the bright banners, the quick movement of many men gave him satisfaction. He noted with grim approval that there was still no straggling.

He stepped from his litter with dignity. His embroidery-encrusted robes could not conceal his exceptional physique. He stood on the path, the bitter blue sky his background, pulling with inelegantly short fingers at the ragged red beard that framed a dark face. Behind his nodding head-dress of red-and-gold and blue the four vivid message flags showed above his shoulders.

Sure of his own forces, Feng paused to consider the enemy army. He turned and surveyed the great bowl of the plain that lay back to the west. Toiling up the pass was his rear-guard of cavalry, their horses hard with service, the blades of their spears dulled with long campaigning. He checked them as they approached and surveyed the country through which they had come.

There was no sign, either on the plain beneath or on the foot-hills that ridged it, of the army of the kingdom of Pei. This did not suit the unconquerable General Feng. He had an anxiety, shared by most military commanders, and satisfied by so few, to know where his enemy was. Shouting messengers therefore halted the march. The men sprawled thankfully against the rocks in the cold sunshine. The captains with their assembling banners joined the General, one by one.

It was the middle of the day, and General Feng and those attending him waited perhaps for the space of two hours before, three miles away at the far end of the valley, a black trickle of soldiery spilled into the plain. Feng could see the tiny specks of

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outriding captains, the momentary flashes from arms and armour.

With those who attended him he moved about at the top of the pass. Banners were uplifted, weapons bared, so that movement answered movement and glint replied to glint.

Then, sure where the army of Pei was and certain that the army of Pei knew his direction, General Feng resumed the march. He climbed with a grunt of contentment into his litter and was borne painfully along, with the clink and click of cavalry at his back.

In such a fashion the great General executed yet one more of the evasive defensive movements for which he was so rightly famed. For three months he had been defending the kingdom of Wu by retreating evolutions of consummate skill. The invading army of Pei had found itself unable to bring him to battle.

And yet, when this same invading army, attempted to force the issue by striking boldly for the territory of Wu itself, it was always found that General Feng was by some means then so placed as to constitute a threat that could not be lightly ignored.

The soldiers of Pei grew weary and not a little fearful of a situation so strange. But those of Wu, now long practised in these bloodless retreats, exalted in the ease of their evolutions, and in the length of their lives. But if his men were unworried, General Feng was not himself without misgivings. It is a wise man who knows the limit of his own powers; but it is not always a happy one. Feng himself knew that the reason for his own fame as a defensive strategist of the highest order was due to a deficiency in his education which it was now too late to remedy.

Owing to circumstances into which it would be impolite to inquire, his military education had stopped short at the first part of it, which was defence. He had never had the advantage of studying or being taught the arts of attack. He had therefore grown up as a military leader unable to do but the one thing, which was to practise defence.

In this present campaign he had one other care. In the area in which the two armies were now manœuvring lay General Feng's own family village, the little settlement of Lung Chi that lay on the mud flats where the river Min met the great river itself.

Naturally, if the hostile army were to pass within reach of his ancestral home, it would be difficult, perhaps, for Feng to maintain his accustomed self-control. The evolutions of his forces were therefore circumscribed by the necessity of preventing the army of Pei from passing in the vicinity of Lung Chi. Feng's skill and experience were enough to overcome this handicap. But the restriction forced him to perform one or two movements which lacked his usual elegance.

And this fact, did not, of course, escape the notice of his master,

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Sun, the celestial, who was the King of Wu. As this all-wise ruler, in his winter palace in the plain, studied the reports presented to him, he smiled with bland displeasure. When he recollected that his General had been born in the region he now defended, he knew the half of it; and when his inquiries discovered for him the name and the position of the birth-place of General Feng, he knew the whole of it.

Therefore he closed his eyes and waved pale hands so that the thin pain of music ceased and those about him went softly away. And then, he summoned those best for the business and dealt with the situation as a ruler should, directly and at once.

As a consequence of this, men came later to General Feng, telling him of the fate of Lung Chi. And Feng, taking a few trusted captains with him, left his army to complete an exacting retreating manœuvre, which by now it could accomplish almost in its sleep. Through a dark afternoon, with a jingling of accoutrements and scrambling of hoofs, the little cavalcade spurred its way towards the confluence of the two rivers.

Then, as the horses stepped delicately down out of the harsh mountain onto the little plain where the rivers met, in the dim light the stench of burnt things guided them to where Lung Chi had been. There was no sound and no movement. A little wind whined across the flat. Black drips fell from the charred timber.

General Feng dismounted and walked heavily across the site. His usually dark face had paled. He plucked absent-mindedly at his glowing beard. A harsh laugh of anguish shook him.

He waved his followers to a distance and began the filial task of finding and seeing to the burial of his father and his mother, and the one brother who had been feeble of wit. Amongst all of the sad bodies there was not one of his own family. This was evidently a detail that had been attended to. The General was suddenly afraid.

There was a cry. The youngest captain was dragging to the General a little girl of perhaps eight summers. He had found her inside a disembowelled water-buffalo, where she had apparently sheltered. She shrieked and fought.

General Feng gave her all his attention. She was unhurt. What was her honourable name she did not know. Who was her father she could not tell.

The General wrapped her in the folds of his robe and sat her before him upon his horse. The child seemed to sense the kindness. Her pale round face looked up to his and behind the features, still contorted with terror, the faint shadow of a smile moved.

Feng looked down at her. "I shall call you Bright Sorrow," he said; and without another look at the home of his fathers he

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spurred away. By the time Feng had rejoined his army he knew clearly what he must do. The hand of the King in this business was only too evident, and the General could understand with cold appreciation how the wise Sun should thus find it necessary to rid his General of a needless distraction.

But he did not flatter himself that the matter ended there; "Surely," he argued, "if the King has found me wanting in this particular, he must mean my death." And he pondered how he could most fittingly save his master the necessity of dispatching him.

It was perhaps because of a long-felt dissatisfaction with his incomplete military education that the thought came to him that it would be best to die in battle for his master. Thus by one stroke he could assure him of his loyalty and remove from him the presence of one unworthy to serve him more. And so the resolve came to General Feng to attack the enemy army of the kingdom of Pei.

So, at the far end of a convenient valley the retreat was halted; and Feng marshalled his men in ranks behind their captains and awaited the appearance of his exasperated pursuers.

It was next morning before they appeared, slowly filing down into the broad valley, congealing into a small mass on the flat ground, spreading and flowing out on either flank, until an armed force of preposterous dimensions confronted the compact ranks of General Feng's army. New to this situation, he watched, fascinated, the operations of his enemies. He could not but admire the marshalling of the great detachments under their respective banners. The ominous booming of the great battle gongs made him wish that he had joined in this pastime before.

But what filled him with even more admiration was the way in which, on a signal from a great horn, the whole of the army of Pei stepped forward briskly several paces and uttered a vast shout which would have intimidated any body of troops who had heard it before. But it had little effect on Feng's small army, which stood its ground with the impassivity of ignorance. And indeed, Feng's men were justified in their phlegm because, having uttered that fearful shout, the army of Pei stepped backwards several paces as briskly as it had formerly advanced.

After this perplexing manœuvre General Feng could not but feel that some demonstration was expected from his own forces, but he, frankly, did not know what to do.

Some action was essential to avoid ridicule. He therefore ordered his captains to ride along the ranks and to instruct the mean soldiery to approach their enemies and to kill them.

The men of Wu therefore gripped the weapons which they had carried so long and used so little, and advanced in an unwary manner upon the confronting army.

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It was now the turn of the enemy general to wonder. He saw that if the army of Wu continued to march stolidly towards his own forces, bloodshed would be inevitable; but he had neither the time nor the wit to prevent it. The leading ranks of General Feng's army reached the opposing lines. Weapons rose and fell.

But the difference between the beautiful and precise exercises of the men of Pei and the uninstructed and quite ugly movements of the men of Wu was that the orderly flourishes compelled admiration while the crude blows dealt death.

So the centre of the Pei battle line gave way precipitately and for a moment left the attackers idle. But even while they panted and looked for more victims to assault, the right and left flanks of the army of Pei, moving in perfect unison, executed with beautiful precision the correct flanking movements and fell upon the eager men of Wu, who resumed their stolid efforts with fresh vigour and with gratifying results.

By the time cold shadows from the mountains swept across the plain, the great invading army of the kingdom of Pei consisted entirely of men who lay dead, and of men who fled wildly away.

Feng himself, wielding the spiked club that he had always carried in case of conflict, had not been able to resist the temptation to join in the fray. And when there was no one left standing, he drew a great breath of pleasure, and of relief.

He stood, a striking figure, his garments rent, his eyes wild, his great chest heaving, while from the farthest points of the field his men were gathering, chattering with excitement, jubilant.

There was feasting that night in the General's pavilion. And there was a great talking of captains. Feng listened with courteous attention to their adulation but was not deeply moved by it. His strong features expressed sober satisfaction as he listened to the compliments and measured the new enthusiasm of his subordinates.

Wang, the captain who devised the fire-rockets, the smoke-clouds and all the terror-causing effects necessary in battle, was speaking, his face dark with wine.

"The ever-victorious General has taught us a new way of war. Ah! To step up to one's adversary and slay him, as if in a quarrel at a fair. So quick, so simple, and so effective."

Wang bowed low. "But to our lord General the praise is due. A new way of fighting! With our hands. In our hands."

And so the praise, the boasting went on. And through much of the feast, until Feng took her out in his arms to sleep, Bright Sorrow sat by the General and was fed by his hand.

Most of his captains thought it strange that the General should

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show concern for a young female child of no practical use; but those who had gone with him to where the two rivers meet knew that he cherished, not Bright Sorrow alone; but in her, Lung Chi and the vanished dwellings there, and the dead voices.

During a restless night the General reviewed his situation, and in the morning he sent two messengers to his master the King of Wu. The first was a fast messenger who was to bear the tidings that the General had decided to seek battle with some hope of success. The second was a slow messenger bearing the news that complete victory had been won.

Feng thought it wise that the news should be broken gently. Even kings, he thought, love to be delighted; but no man cares to be astonished. Still further to lengthen the period of the King's pleasure, the enemy general and his two surviving captains (all in good condition) were sent off in prison carts timed to reach the capital two days after the second messenger.

Although much encouraged by his unexpected success, Feng did not feel that it, in itself, was enough to wipe out the memory of his divided loyalty. He still felt that he deserved death and, though much relieved that it had eluded him, even while seeking it, was still determined to hazard his life. No sooner, therefore, was the booty of the baggage train properly apportioned and secured, than he gave orders for his army to march upon the great city of Yat, the capital of the kingdom of Pei.

The march took only three days. There was no opposition and, on the late afternoon of the third day, as his army toiled across a fat plain of good paddy fields, there in the centre, great, rich, and ripe, lay the city of Yat.

The wall was a high one and built of heavy red stones; but the ground within the city rose to a little eminence so that the rioting colours of green and blue and yellow roofs flaunted above the rose-red walls. And in the evening sun the walls themselves glowed like blood. Feng directed that the army should encamp on a small eminence by the side of the road to the city, where a now-deserted farm lay hidden in a grove of bamboo. And while these preparations were going forward he rode on with his chief captains to survey the defences of Yat.

As the little group trotted at a short distance from the great city wall, the General was much perplexed by the difficulty of the task before him. Straight and strong, and as high as three men, the wall stretched without a break. The massive city gate was flanked by intimidating towers provided with every convenience for effluents, noisome or death-dealing.

The soldiery who manned the walls were numerous and offensive both in attitude and in speech. Feng gained no comfort from his

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reconnaissance. He rode back to the encampment, his great head sunk in thought.

But in the palace of the city of Yat more than perplexity was rife. The King of that region, Yen Lung Chen, knew fear. His general and all his captains were lost. In the last two days pallid survivors of the battle in the mountains had brought to him fearful stories of the might and prowess of the great General Feng.

The downright methods of the soldiers of Wu had presented something new and horrific in the art of warfare. Their stories had been desperately embroidered to justify their flight; and Yen had paled as he listened. Their execution had given him little satisfaction.

He was at heart a man of mild temper, long used to harassing the neighbouring kingdom of Wu, partly as a means of keeping the wilder sort of his chieftains employed far away from him, and partly because the kingdom of Wu had been long-suffering and always more prone to defend itself than to retaliate.

He had hardly contemplated the possibility of an attack upon his own city. But had he done so, he would have expected it to be conducted in a courteous and conventional manner. The rough brutalities of which he had heard and the coarse resort to direct death-dealing methods to which he now knew General Feng to be addicted, filled him with fear of the unfamiliar. A chill foreboding held him inactive.

The slight figure of the King moved over to the window opening. Nervous fingers pulled aside the drapery. Troubled eyes looked out into the night. Beneath and around, the steady drone of a wakeful city came to him.

Beyond the yellow sparkle of lanterns and torches, below, away out in the dark plain outside the walls, there was the flicker of red camp-fires and the keen whisper of distant revelry. Yen turned his back on the night and huddled himself in his great chair. He was a man with trouble on his mind.

And at about the same time, General Feng sat alone in his pavilion. Bright Sorrow was long since asleep. Her little round face, framed so neatly with black hair, was calm and untroubled. She slept smiling. Though it was late the camp was still astir and Feng could hear the captains calling on their companies and checking their readiness for action.

But what form this action might take Feng did not yet know. Not only had he never attacked a city, he had never been so maladroit as to become beleaguered in one; so that he was without any plan. If the enemy should come out, he could do what he had already done once before; but if they should remain within their walls he did not know what best to do, and still less what first to do.

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After pacing his tent for a long time he could think of only two practical tasks for the morrow. The first would be to set his men to cut long poles of bamboo. His army contained a contingent of experts armed with long poles with hooks upon them with which ambushed horsemen could be dragged from their mounts and taken captive. It occurred to Feng that if these sharp hooks were fastened upon poles long enough, defenders who showed themselves upon the walls might be hooked and dragged down.

His other thought was to ask Lao-Wang, the oldest and most learned of his captains, to compute how many boulders from the mountains would be needed to build a roadway up to the top of the wall. Feng could envisage each man of his army bearing one boulder to plant against the wall. But he had a suspicion that either the number of boulders, or the distance to the mountains, would be too great.

On the next day, then, those who watched from the walls of Yat witnessed a great chopping down of bamboo and a great coming and going of parties of soldiery to and from the distant mountains. What the laden carts carried could not at first be discerned; but when a vast pile of great stones could be seen rising amid the stricken bamboo grove beside the now-exposed farmhouse, there was a great wonder in Yat.

And of all the inhabitants of Yat, the King Yen wondered the most deeply. These strange activities still further added to his fears.

Only the Princess Tung-Fang was with him in his chamber. The untiring efforts of three successive wives had failed to provide Yen with a son. Yen spat upon their memories. To be sustained by stalwart men-children at this hour would have heartened him.

The fact that his only daughter was a warrior maiden of great skill and courage was little consolation. There had been warrior maidens before her, and all of them had exhibited the grave defect of falling in love with their adversaries, either because of admiration for those who vanquished them in combat, or from pity for those that lay helpless, themselves subdued.

So Yen looked sourly upon the maiden, who knelt humbly in full battle array before him, pleading to be allowed to lead a sortie against the enemy.

She rose to her feet as her father rejected her request, long pheasant feathers in her jewelled head-dress quivering in the air behind her, the heavy military robes glinting with many colours.

"Amiable but useless daughter," said Yen, sitting slumped in despondency in his chair, "what you propose is not good. This man and these men have ways of fighting that are indecorous in the extreme. I think we must conceal from them such skill in arms

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as we have in the hope that they may rate it higher than it deserves and that soft words now may save us hard blows."

Tung-Fang stood still in dutiful obedience. Yen looked at the flawless symmetry of her pale face, saw the flash of dark eyes under long, black lashes. He sensed the disagreement which it would have been unfilial for Tung-Fang to have expressed.

"Be content," he told her. "There is a mission for you to perform. You must go this night with a suitable escort and treat with the foreign General. I am minded to submit ourselves to the King of Wu on suitable terms. Your employment as my representative will give assurance of our sincerity." He waved a small hand in dismissal.

That night, while General Feng still strove to think of fresh offensive expedients to add to his inadequate preparations, he was checked by a clamour of shouting in the camp. He went quickly to the doorway of his pavilion. A confusion of torches was approaching.

In a minute, with inward confusion, but with a calm demeanour he was welcoming the Princess Tung-Fang. She was escorted by two elderly courtiers with severe but respectful expressions. General Feng invited the small party into his pavilion and ordered chairs to be provided.

While they were standing, he could not but be impressed with the gorgeous panoply, with the martial bearing, and with the rare beauty of Tung-Fang. When they were all seated he courteously inquired the reason for the visit. It was Tung-Fang who spoke, her military character excusing such forward behaviour.

She inquired if she were addressing the great and resplendent General Feng Shau-shan commanding the armies of the King of Wu, and on being reassured she delivered her message.

"My venerable father, the great and ever-victorious King of Yat, grieves sorely at the unpleasantness which has arisen between the two kingdoms. He is ever mindful of the good moral precepts and would live at peace. He is anxious to pay a ceremonial visit to the King of Wu and purposes to make three profound bows before him and to beg leave to call him elder brother.

"The King begs that you will make known his wishes to your great lord, and in the meantime trusts that he may regard himself and his city as under the protection of the King of Wu, and of his armies. He has ordered me, his daughter, to invite you and your captains and a suitable number of your men to accept his hospitality in the city."

While she was speaking Tung-Fang had not failed to be impressed by the rude vigour and the splendid proportions of the

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enemy General. She observed the extreme hairiness of him with a shudder that gave her pleasure. The outrageous redness of his whiskers offended her fastidious sensibilities and excited her mind.

She had spoken boldly, as befits a martial character; but as her formal speech neared its end, she had become increasingly conscious of her sex, and the invitation to visit Yat was given with a face decently downcast and with slanting eyes respectfully averted so that General Feng could survey her without loss of dignity.

And after a long and trying campaign the sight was a rewarding one; but the pleasantness of the news enabled Feng to restrain his feelings.

He replied that, unworthy as he was, he would accept the gracious invitation and trusted that his uncouth appearance and lack of manners would not offend the great King of Yat. As he uttered the words and as he stole another glance at the gracious ivory-tinted face, little Bright Sorrow ran to him and pulled his hand.

"Does the great General bring a worthless woman-child to share his glory?" asked Tung-Fang with great surprise. "Or is this some magic charm he is pleased to employ?"

Feng was embarrassed to explain the presence of anything so worthless as a little girl and was forced to recount some of the story of the destruction of Lung Chi. "Besides my ignoble self, this is all that remains of Lung Chi," he explained.

The eyes of Tung-Fang flashed up to his again. "The many wives of the great General must assuredly have provided some six or more fine sons to do your memory honour," she ventured.

Feng admitted with shame that he had been too much occupied with warfare to marry and that therefore no sons yet existed to cherish his memory.

There did not seem to be anything more than this that the Princess wished to know, and with profuse ceremony she was conducted from the camp. And with her companions, she cantered out into the darkness towards the gleaming city.

On the morrow, King Yen himself rode out to meet his guests. The city gates and the narrow paved streets were gay with banners and bright silken streamers. Pale and slight himself, Yen welcomed with the utmost graciousness his barbarous-looking guest. He was awed by the rough physical splendour of the General, and now felt quite sure that his appeasing attitude had been the wise one.

During the days and nights of feasting that followed, General Feng had little time to reassess his situation. The brimming cups of hot, tangy rice-wine that were emptied, the pledges drunk

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in numbing sugar alcohol, flavoured with peaches, were beyond counting.

An agreeable background impression was provided by the visits of the Princess between feasts to discuss the finer points of military tactics. Soldiers, between campaigns, are wont to talk together; but seldom, let it be admitted, have two soldiers talked together so agreeably, so long, and with such wistfulness.

For General Feng still held his loyalty to the King of Wu and must return to secure consent to Yen's proposal and to renew his service with his lord.

When the time came for departure, both the King of Yat and, be it confessed, the people of Yat, also, witnessed the departure of the guests with proper courtesy and with genuine delight.

But there was one small person in Yat who grieved to see them go; and while Yen, as a special mark of respect, accompanied the General on the first stage of his journey back to Wu, the pale Princess in a high palace window looked through wet lashes for a last glimpse of the highly-esteemed red whiskers.

On the journey home the General had time to ponder matters, and he felt with some justification that the gratifying news he had to bring would restore him to royal favour. But he felt weary of campaigning and was a little shaken by his new knowledge of the uncertainties of employment in high places. He felt, as many generals had felt before him, a yearning for retirement.

His welcome at the capital was a very warm one and the clamour in the streets could still be heard as he was received in audience by King Sun. The King was immensely amiable, and cutting short General Feng's dutiful prostrations, he raised him up and sat him in a chair at his side.

When Feng told him in detail of the handsome proposals of the King of Yat, Sun could scarcely conceal a smile of satisfaction. He promised that favourable thought should be given to the matter.

At the feast that was given that evening the King showed General Feng every sign of favour. He pressed upon the General delicacies especially contrived to please him; and all the guests strove to pay compliments to the man so favoured by their lord.

The singers and the dancers and the tumblers, and the men who made magic with smoke and flash came and went. The music wavered in thin spirals above the brazening of gongs. Yellow faces became copper-coloured as good wine did its work. It was a babel of shouted greetings, music, and laughter.

And when it was done, when the final rice had been brought

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in and drinking was at an end and the guests made their obeisances, the King drew General Feng apart. "We shall walk in the garden and feel the moonlight," he suggested.

Together they walked on the pavement in the deep courtyard, where peach and cherry, willow and bamboo, in early bud, hung in thin tracery against the sky. The impartial stars twinkled inconsequentially: the moon reached down to splash white patches in the darkness.

The King was anxious to reward his General. Feng, with circumspection, expressed his desire. He had expended all his manhood in the King's service. He felt the need for solitude and reflection. The village of his ancestors had suffered in the last campaign. He asked that he might go there and, as a humble farmer, bring back some life to the vanished settlement. The King readily agreed.

Some three weeks later, on the smitten plot of land where the Min river meets the great river itself, Feng tilled the ground, because the spring season was at hand. With his own hands he made his rude hut of bamboo, and with his own hands he had restored some of the ditches that would irrigate the fields he tilled. Now, behind his water-buffalo, guiding his plough of sharpened timber, he was turning over the black, glistening soil.

Dressed only in rough cotton, his torso bared to the keen wind that whipped off the mountains, his fine physique was such as to invite applause. But his audience was small and, in any case, uncritical. Sitting on a heap of broken masonry, Bright Sorrow watched him with love and pleasure. The return to Lung Chi had not affected her. She had shown no sign of grief or horror, but had begun at once happily to help in keeping house.

What was at the bottom of Feng's mind, man cannot know; but perhaps he hoped, besides knowing that ancestral duty demanded the resurrection of Lung Chi, that one day a husband for Bright Sorrow would hap that way and Lung Chi might at last be quickened with toil and festival, with tears and laughter once again.

If this was indeed his hope, he laboured very happily in it. As spring wore on, amid the black and scarred ruin of the old village, bright green patches of rice seedlings at last began to shine. Feng and Bright Sorrow were very happy together, he in his labour and in his thoughts, and she in the happy present of childhood.

And the weeks wore on, the season of Excited Insects arrived and the air was full of the buzz and hum of life and of the call and chirrup of birds. Great fish leapt flashing in the river and the heavy scent of blossom floated past in the breezes.

Bright Sorrow saw the Executioners first. She was standing,

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rigid with terror, screaming, one hand pointing at twelve advancing horsemen. They were armed, and they shouted no salutation.

It was odd that Feng had not expected them. What other thing he could have expected King Sun to do, it is hard to imagine. If one looks at the matter rationally, from the King's point of view, there is only the one decision that could be arrived at. The wish to retire to the birth-place which had been razed to the ground for reasons of policy, quite plainly argued a disposition sullen at the least, probably resentful, and possibly revengeful.

How could Sun wisely risk the continuance of a situation which had awkward possibilities? The only strange thing is that he delayed the execution so long.

However, Feng was surprised. He leapt from out of the mud, and seized Bright Sorrow in one hand and his long, heavy mattock in the other. Carrying the child, he raced for the boulders that encumbered the river shore. Here horses could not come and, with the river at his back, he might make a stand.

The twelve men were unhurried, the day was young and they had no mind to risk unnecessary injury. They tethered their horses and, spreading fan-wise, approached warily, step by step. Bright Sorrow was quiet now. Feng set her on a boulder and stood in front of her. His face had darkened with the thrill of combat. The red hair that sprouted from head and face and chest flamed in the morning sun. His arms, hardened by much work, balanced the great mattock as if it were a twig.

There was a hoarse shout, a scrambling rush, and five of the men came in close, two spears held well forward, three swords upraised. Feng leapt forward, a swing up and down of the mattock shattered the spears and clove a head. The spearmen ran, two swordsmen backed warily. And the third did not move.

There was a consultation. Then the attackers, at a safer distance, began to hurl large stones. Against these Feng had no defence. He retired quickly behind the largest boulder. He knew well that now the situation was out of his control.

While the hurling stones kept his head down, two spearmen advanced cautiously towards the boulder from either side. Feng could sense but could not see their approach.

The nearest levelled his spear to strike over behind the boulder. As he made his lunge the breath hissed from his throat where an arrow had pierced it. There was a cry of alarm and dismay from the attackers as a shower of arrows whined amongst them.

And, as they howled, a horn sounded to their right and there was a noise of soldiers shouting. And to their left across the great river, there was a sound of gongs, and the glint of arms. And they looked behind them over the shoulder of the mountain whence they

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had come, and signal rockets smoked into the air and men on horses broke out of the trees. And from in front of them still came arrows singing, so that they threw down their arms and sat, in a group, and the shooting of the arrows ceased.

Feng now forsook his shelter and came out into the open with Bright Sorrow in his arms, and he looked about him to discover the cause of all this clamour.

And one on a horse, very splendidly apparelled, came galloping across the site of old Lung Chi, and it was Tung-Fang. Her face was stern as she approached; and lovely when she saw that Feng was unharmed. Her eyes dropped, her pale face flushed.

Feng thanked her very warmly for the timely rescue. He asked her what happy chance had brought her there.

Tung-Fang looked at him with care. "My noble father the King Yen Lung Chen is dead," she told him. "He is buried and has gone to his fathers. And I have a mind to send messengers to Sun, the King of Wu, that I am not prepared to make three obeisances to him and to call him elder brother.

"But that is a decision upon which one seeks advice. I would ask my general, but I was my father's general and this unworthy one has none. I would ask my husband, but this forsaken creature has no husband. I therefore determined to seek advice from a man who would think wisely on these matters."

General Feng placed Bright Sorrow on the saddle before the Princess and he looked up to her, very terrible in his strength, and he said, "Princess, where and who is this man?"

And the Princess shaded her eyes with one hand and looked down the river valley. "If I look yonder," she said, "he is far away. But if I look close, he is here. If I look abroad, it is any man in the earth. But if I look here it is you."

Feng lowered his head in thought, and looked to where his recent assailants were being briskly disposed of.

"Is your allegiance to your King still living?" asked the Princess.

"It lies dead, with those," said Feng, and with sudden energy he lifted her with great solicitude from her horse.

Bright Sorrow still sat there smiling as two faces met. Feng's thoughts were racing ahead; but those of the Princess Tung-Fang were concerned solely with the delicious prickle of stiff red whiskers.

★ *Exciting new stories by BRYAN MACMAHON, —WILLIAM SAROYAN—ARTHUR GORDON— LIN YUTANG—in next month's ARGOSY*

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Invitation

★

THERE'S nothing like an endless party,
A collection of clammy little groups,
Where a couple of the guests are arty
And the rest of the guests are goops.
There's the confidential girlish chatter—
It soothes you like a drug—
And the gentle pitter-patter
As the anchovies hit the rug.
There's the drip, drip, drip of the mayonnaise
As the customers' lips slip on the canapés,
There are feuds that are born,
There are friendships that pine away,
And the big cigar that smoulders on the Steinaway.
The major trouble with a party
Is you need a guest to give it for,
And the best part of any guest
Is the last part out the door.

There's nothing like an endless party,
And there hasn't been since ancient Rome.
Here's Silenus making passes at Astarte
While Mrs. Silenus begs him to go home.
There is bigamy about the boudoirs,
There is bundling at the bar,
And the sideboard where the food was
Has the aspect of an abattoir.
You wonder why they pursue each other's wives,
Who by now resemble the cream cheese and the chives.
There's a corpse on the floor
From New Rochelle or Scarborough,
And its mate is swinging from the candelabara.
The best location for a party
Is a room without a floor,
And the best way to give a party
Is leave town the night before.

OGDEN NASH

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ARGOSY'S enthralling new novel

THE STORY OF

ESTHER COSTELLO

by NICHOLAS MONSARRAT

THE four children played in the ruined cottage just outside the small village of Cloncraig in the County of Wexford, in Southern Ireland—the cottage, long deserted, where the man and his wife and the children had all been killed, away back during the troubles. Its door hung askew, its windows gaped: grass grew between the turf walls and sprouted from the floor-boards.

The Black-and-Tan place, their parents called it, and cursed the memory when the children were not by; but for the children—Esther Costello and her brother, Michael Fairlie with the limp, and young Denis Finane—for them it was just a fine place to play, and safely out of call of the grown-ups.

It had become more exciting still since Esther discovered the cellar.

Esther Costello was ten, and the eldest of the four; the others followed her, though she was only a girl, because she knew the best games, and was daring always, and strong enough to punch their heads if need be.

There was also (though they did not know this, and would have spat derisively if they had been told) an element of great beauty in her small, lively face. But to look at them otherwise, there was nothing much to choose between the four children: they were all ragged, barefoot, ill-nourished: the outdoor air had put a deceptive brown upon their faces, not really hiding the pallid skins below.

Their hair, which never knew a comb from one month's end to another, hung matted and over-long: their hands and feet alike were filthy. The boys wore bleached khaki shorts, Esther a faded skirt and a ravelled woollen jersey. The quartet, in fact, looked what they were—the products of a poor Irish village, and of feckless

The book everyone is talking about

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by the author of "The Cruel Sea"

Turning away from the brutal world of war, Monsarrat chooses a poignant and compelling new theme: the beauty of a young girl becomes the focus of a struggle between forces no less cruel and characters no less vivid.

Pre-war journalist, war-time Lieut.-Commander, 1951 Heinemann prize-winner for "The Cruel Sea," Monsarrat, now 43, directs the U.K. Information office in Ottawa, where he is living with his South African born wife.

In "Esther Costello," writing with increased insight, he wrests brilliant entertainment from the stuff of tragedy.

The story will be presented by Argosy in four parts.

parents who, lacking the resources or the patience to train their families, thankfully let them run wild.

The children were thus, as free young animals, singularly happy for most of the time, and especially so on this May morning, when Esther—newly-elected Captain of the Cellar—was allowing them for the first time to see what she had found below the flagged, stone floor.

Its entrance was by a trapdoor beside the fireplace, masked by a stack of crumbling peats and discovered by Esther when she was scavenging for kindling. A ladder led down to it, and there, by candlelight, she had come upon an empty room, stone-flagged, swept clean, which must have lain hidden in musty darkness for at least twenty years.

The cellar had become their headquarters for the most secret meetings of all. But a few weeks later they had found something else, something better still. Hidden treasure, no less—or so it seemed likely to turn out.

It was, once more and inevitably, Esther who had chanced to stamp on a hollow flagstone, and become curious, and, when her brother and the others were gone, prised it up and discovered the strange hoard below. Four boxes they were, wrapped tight in old newspapers, and round them all a big, rotted mackintosh sheet.

And in the boxes?

"I'm not saying," said Esther, when she first reported the find to an awed audience.

"Is it treasure?" asked Denis Finane, a small wizened caricature of a child who looked almost a decade older than his nine years. "Is it gold, then?"

this brilliant Writer's latest Success

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"It's not gold," said Esther, tantalizing.

"Tell us, Esther," said her brother, Johnny Costello. "What's in the boxes?"

Michael Fairlie, limping round on his twisted leg, affected disdain. "There's nothing there," he said scornfully, over his shoulder. "It's empty boxes. Firewood."

"All right," said Esther, feminine and tough at the same time. "It's empty boxes."

"Don't listen to him," said Denis Finane, ready to weep with curiosity. "Tell us what's in them."

"Nothing," said Esther. "You heard him say."

And so her perverse mood had remained, until today, when at last she was going to show them what she had found.

What she had found did not readily identify itself to any of them.

They went down the ladder by candlelight, one by one, and under Esther's direction the flagstone was prised up again, and the boxes levered out. Inside each of them was an old canvas pack, such as travelling tinkers carried, but so rotten now that it tore when it was touched; and inside the pack two little kegs, like beer barrels, full of black powder—some of it wet, some of it dry still.

Alongside each were three or four metal objects, like iron balls, but egg-shaped and fluted. Each had a small metal ring attached, hanging down from its middle.

Michael Fairlie dropped one of these strange things on the floor. It rang on the stone flag, setting up a small tinny echo. It did not bounce, like a ball; it did not break or crack: it did nothing.

In the candlelight the children looked at each other, puzzled.

"Well," said Johnny Costello. "What is it, then? Some old game?"

"'Tis powder," offered Denis Finane excitedly.

Esther opened another of the kegs—the wooden staves were loose and rotted—and dipped her finger in the powder, and tasted it with the tip of her tongue. It looked like black sugar, but it was salty and bitter, different from anything she had ever tasted before. She stood in silence, disappointed that her "treasure" should have turned out like this—nothing special, just dull and flat, with no sense in it.

Out of the corner of her eyes she saw her brother Johnny pick up another metal "egg," and jerk out the pin, and then hold it momentarily to his ear, listening. She pushed the keg of powder she had opened back into the box again, and Johnny, following her, tossed the metal object on top of it.

Esther turned away into a corner, to snuff a guttering candle, and to think out what to say to them.

Behind her back there was a flash, and a monstrous explosion which delivered an intolerable blow at the nape of her neck. Above her head the whole cottage floor lifted, and daylight poured in upon them; but for Esther there was suddenly nothing but pain, and stifling darkness, and then oblivion.

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The grown-ups bore the wreckage home : the small corpses of the dead, and the bodies of the barely living. Young Michael Fairlie had gone limping straight to Heaven, and Johnny Costello with him : little Denis Finane lingered long enough to open surprised eyes to the ceiling before joining them. Only Esther Costello clung to life, and slowly made good her hold on it.

By some freak of the explosion—because she was a few feet farther off, or because her body was turned at some merciful angle—she was apparently unharmed : the pretty, young face was without blemish, the immature body unmarked and untwisted.

The blood with which her clothes were drenched was, amazingly, none of hers. But the shock had been tremendous, driving deep into some hard secret core every trace of feeling, every normal faculty.

She lay unconscious for many days and nights, while the doctor from nearby Wexford did what he could, which was little enough ; she showed no sign of life, nor of death either. Thus she lay, while her small friends were buried, and the inquest was begun and then adjourned ; and Cloncraig gossiped or speculated or kept its mouth prudently shut.

Her parents, mourning Johnny, the only son, prayed long and fervently that Esther, the only daughter, might live. But when she did live, it might be that they wished within their hearts that they could recall those long prayers.

For Esther Costello, on awakening, could neither see, hear, nor speak.

Now, three or four months after the explosion, she was the same as when she was brought in, except that she could move more readily, and seemed free of pain.

"A massive shock to the central nervous system," the doctor from Dublin had said ; and the phrase was repeated round the village with the wise head-shaking of baffled men to accompany it.

Mrs. Costello, dull and slatternly, was not equipped to deal with anything save the simple necessities ; and her father—who had been a cobbler, and a good one, but had drunk away his skill and his trade for ten wasted years—her father took himself more and more frequently to the bar of the Cloncraig Arms, and gave less and less thought to something which puzzled, angered, and defeated him.

The only person who tried to bring effective aid to Esther was Father Haggerty, the parish priest ; and he was the last one who kept on trying.

With all the will and love and prayers in the world, he could not reach her mind. Nor could anyone else. Before long the priest, like the doctor, stopped coming to see her. There was no way in which either of them could help.

Last of all, the parents themselves retreated. Within a year, the Costellos had moved Esther from the house and down to a small shack at the bottom of the garden, where she was out of harm's way, and could find her path to the nearby privy herself.

As the months passed she grew thin, and pale as a slug : only

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the useless eyes seemed to grow larger and, indeed, lovelier, burning coldly in the centre of a pinched grey face.

THE large black American car, with chromium bumpers and white sidewall tyres, which entered by the dusty Wexford road, and pulled up outside the Cloncraig Arms, created an enormous stir in the village. Not only was it the first car from " outside " which had visited them since the war's end, it was the first car of such opulence ever to arrive in Cloncraig. It was a sight to see—and the same might well be said of its single occupant, the woman who presently stepped from the driving-seat and began to look about her.

She was a woman of forty-one or two, tall, impressively built, fashionably dressed : a handsome woman, a woman of assurance, a woman (clearly) of the world. She was in black, with furs : her stockings were of fine mesh, her heels (by Irish village standards) wonderfully high.

She looked " for all the world like a French whore," said Paddy Finane, who had never seen a whore of any nationality.

But it was a fact that the stranger had a certain distinction, a certain urban elegance new to Cloncraig, and therefore dubious ; and when she disappeared into the Cloncraig Arms, a large number of people waited about at the door in the hope that she might reappear, and were disappointed when she did not, and when her luggage followed her inside.

" Gone to bed," explained the landlord, Joe Lane, later, when the bar was at its most crowded. " A plate of cold mutton and pickles, a cut off the cheese, and two whisky-and-sodas. And just now a hot-water bottle."

" That's what I'd like to be," said Paddy Finane, snickering. "A hot-water bottle to a big, handsome woman like that."

Encouraged by the laughter, he went on to suggest other offices he might perform, given goodwill on both sides.

" You ! " interrupted James Costello, who was drunk already. " I'll bet that woman upstairs could teach you a thing or two."

"What's she doing in Cloncraig, anyway?" asked a voice at the back.

" Looking for a husband," said another.

The rough laughter brought Joe Lane to the front of the bar again.

" She's from America," he said importantly. " She's touring round in that car—seeing the country. Her name's Mrs. Bannister. She's just down from Dublin." He kept his major item till the last.

" She says she was born here in Cloncraig."

" What was her name, then ? " asked several voices.

" Maclean," said Joe Lane. " But there's none of that name here now. Must have been before my time."

Most people in the bar turned to old Neil Fairlie for confirmation.

He nodded. " There *was* a family of that name, that went away to America, near forty years ago. They lived down by the bridge. Neil Maclean—I mind him because he had the same name as me. There was two or three children, too. Aye, it might be the same."

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" She's grown up a bit since then," said Paddy Finane, pursuing obliquely the thoughts which never seemed to leave him. "And married as well. Someone's a lucky man."

" Mrs. Bannister," said Neil Fairlie musingly. " That's a good Irish name, too. I wonder what old Neil Maclean came to, in America. He was a stone-mason when he left. Must have made money, by the look of *her*."

They discussed Mrs. Bannister for a long time—her looks, her gait, her clothes, the purpose of her visit. Presently the serving-girl, who had taken up the hot-water bottle, put her head round the corner of the bar to report that the visitor wore a lace nightgown " you could see half a mile through," and had a special travelling-case with nothing but paint and powder and scent in it.

" What did I tell you ? " said Paddy Finane triumphantly. " She's a real madam, that one."

It was years since Cloncraig had seen such a person ; and not within living memory had the Cloncraig Arms housed a woman staying by herself, let alone one like this.

The knowledge that just above their heads slept a woman of this special, exotic quality—married, but travelling alone without her husband—in silk and lace, with boxes of paint and powder close to hand—the knowledge that such a woman shared the Cloncraig Arms with them took hold of the men in the bar, pricking them strangely.

She might have been there beside them : they could not keep away from her, they could not escape her effect. They could almost smell that perfume, touch that nightgown, see those soft reclining limbs . . .

It gave them all a continuing itch of masculinity. The talk that night was very bawdy.

On the floor above them, in the comfortable creaking warmth of Joe Lane's best bedroom, the object of all their thoughts, Mrs. Bannister, was reading herself to sleep.

In bed, in the lace nightgown which had so scandalized the servant-girl, Belle Bannister was to some extent softened and feminized ; but she still looked, and was, a self-sufficient woman with the combined elegance and toughness of metropolitan America. Good-looking she certainly was, with dark colouring and a fine fresh skin, but the " French whore " stricture of Paddy Finane could not have been wider of the mark.

In Cloncraig, she shone with suspect brilliance : in her own milieu, she looked what she was—a handsome, tailored, slightly masculine woman, well able to take care of herself, having lived her own life for twenty years and regretting very little of it.

Of course, she could not remember the village at all : the Cloncraig of thirty-five years ago, when she was six, might be the same now or it might have changed, but she could recall nothing of it, either way. The Maclean family had emigrated shortly before the First World War : time had carried away all details of the event, save that the journey was long and uncomfortable, and that for many years after it they had been desperately poor.

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But, her father, progressing from stone-mason to speculative builder, had made his pile, and now, after his death, she had her share of it: she herself had married, and that was over too; and so, being free, she had come back to Cloncraig, as her father had told her to, to have a look at the place where she was born.

She hadn't meant to startle them in the village—she was aware now of the effect of the car and of her own get-up—but she simply hadn't realized what Cloncraig would be like, and just how simple, how grounded in the narrow past, an Irish village could be. It had made her feel, for a moment, very much the American tourist of modern legend.

"What a dump," she phrased it to herself aloud; and then: "No—what a poor, left-behind place." She would do better for them tomorrow, anyway: she had some old tweeds in one of the trunks.

A fresh burst of laughter came from below. Seemingly they could enjoy themselves here, whether they had been left behind or not. But that did not alter what she had seen as she drove slowly through on her arrival, and what the "hotel" itself told her—the shabbiness and the bitter poverty that possessed the whole village, the village where she was born.

It would be nice to do something for Cloncraig.

Despite the "old tweeds" (a Glen Urquhart check which had first seen the occidental light of day on Fifth Avenue), Mrs. Bannister continued to cause a major stir in Cloncraig. The children hung in swarms round her car, leaving small and filthy fingermarks on the paintwork; good-naturedly, she would sometimes select a dozen of them and, packing them in like freshly netted sardines, take them on a tour of their village. The shrieks, the waving, the open-mouthed spectators, gave to such excursions a touch of royalty which would have affected a woman of far lesser vanity . . . She explored the village, and paid a formal call on the place of her birth, a mean cottage at the lower end of the village now occupied by Cloncraig's blacksmith.

This visit was a qualified success, since Mrs. Bannister made heavy weather of the blacksmith's brogue, and the blacksmith could not make head or tail of an American accent ("She talked like a damned buzz-saw," he told inquirers later); but there was a good deal of dumb-show cordiality throughout, and the pound note which changed hands at the end was an effective sweetener.

It was a charm which worked on other occasions, too: when, for instance, she came down to the bar of the Cloncraig Arms and stood two rounds of pints and double-whiskies, there were many ready to swear that America must be a hell of a fine place, and its womenfolk its best ambassadors.

She was in the village for a full week before she met Father Haggerty.

He was the first person to tell her about Esther Costello.

This silence of Cloncraig was no conspiracy: they really had

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forgotten the girl, so horribly stricken, who had lain out of sight and mind for more than two years, whom no eye ever saw. She did not come up in any conversation, because her very name had fallen out of currency; and James Costello, the only person in the village who might have mentioned her, was now a befuddled wreck who rarely managed a coherent sentence, and had addressed none of any sort to the visitor.

Mrs. Bannister was very shocked. "But what's been done about her?" she asked, as soon as Father Haggerty gave her the facts. "Hasn't she been hospitalized?"

"What's that?" asked Father Haggerty, puzzled.

"Have the doctors seen her? What have they tried?"

"There was the doctor from Wexford, and another from Dublin," explained Father Haggerty. "But they couldn't do anything for her at all, they said. That's nearly three years ago now."

"What's been happening since, then?"

"Nothing," said Father Haggerty. He looked at Mrs. Bannister almost humbly. "What could we do? It's a poor village—there's no money for big doctors, and hospitals, and such."

"But it's so appalling . . . You mean she just stays in the house all the time?"

"In a little shed," said Father Haggerty. One of those strange, chiding thoughts tapped gently at his brain. He glanced once more, covertly, at Mrs. Bannister, at her rings and her pearl necklace. "Would you like to see her, then?"

"I certainly would," said Mrs. Bannister. "Fix it for me, will you, Father?"

Going down the overgrown garden path, with Mrs. Costello fluttering ahead of them, and James Costello regarding them owlishly from the kitchen door, Mrs. Bannister was aware of a strange feeling. It was as if she were stepping consciously into the future, doing something which would involve her, irrevocably, in a new aspect of life.

This crazy cavalcade—the dirty, sallow woman, the old priest, and herself—seemed to be moving into a queer country which, within a few moments, might capture her entirely and remake her mind and body.

Mrs. Costello, leading the way, stopped in front of a lean-to shed, and pushed open its door. A shaft of wan sunlight fell upon the floor as Mrs. Bannister peered within.

"God!" said Mrs. Bannister.

Esther Costello, lying on her blanket bed, was indeed a horrifying sight. She lay with her eyes open and her arms crossed—the eyes like dead pools, the arms like yellow sticks: she lay in frightful impassivity, like some mangy animal, used to freedom, which loses in captivity the wish to seem alive or to care for itself in any way. Her fair hair, cropped close, was filthy and unkempt: there were livid sores round her mouth: the pinched face above the scrawny neck was like a shrunken skull.

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The bed had a tumble of disgusting, threadbare blankets on it. There were bits of stale bread on the floor of the shed, gnawed bones, hen-droppings. The place smelt acridly and vilely, and the girl herself was the noisome centre of it.

Even as they stared at her—the priest with shame, Mrs. Bannister with horror—she moved. She levered herself up, threw aside the blankets, and felt her way along the edge of the bed towards the door.

The three of them fell back, as before a leper or a loose animal, while she fumbled for the edge of the door and the beginning of the rope. Outside in the sunlight, she seemed to become, in some final degree, a blasphemy of the human shape.

She was dressed, they now saw, in a single garment, a kind of smock or shift, torn, stained brown, reaching halfway down her thighs: below it, her shanks were wizened like an old man's, and her spindly legs moved jerkily, as she felt her way along the frayed rope that reached to the privy.

She turned her head this way and that, as if feeling for the sun: the blind eyes still roved about her hopefully, the head was cocked as if still expecting some faint sound from the world. The small developing breasts under the shift were a last cruel flourish of mockery; for by their evidence, their shy promise, she was, in all her horror, in all her degradation, a girl of thirteen on the bright edge of womanhood.

"She knows when she wants to go," said Mrs. Costello.

The priest and Mrs. Bannister prayed, the one for forgiveness, the other that she might not vomit.

They watched Esther return after a time, stumbling and groping along in the same way, and then burrowing under the blankets again in search of warmth. When the door was shut on her: "For Heaven's sake, why don't you look after her properly?" asked Mrs. Bannister in a sudden fury. "That's the wickedest thing I've ever seen."

"We do the best we can," said Mrs. Costello forlornly. "Money's hard to come by, these days."

"It doesn't cost money to keep her clean . . . She should be in an institution, anyway, with proper care."

"We do the best we can."

"God forgive us all," said Father Haggerty.

"Or better still, the doctors should look her over again, and see if anything's changed."

"Doctors cost money," whined Mrs. Costello.

"Father," said Mrs. Bannister, turning to the old man, "we *must* do something."

The priest nodded, hopeful and fearful at the same time, wondering what was in her mind, and whether it could be the miracle that long ago he had prayed for. "What can we do?" he asked, trembling with age and fear and hope. "What can we do?"

The American car fetched the doctor from Wexford and then the doctor from Dublin; but neither could add anything to what

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they had said already—the "massive shock" still persisted, and showed no signs of abating.

Mrs. Bannister cast about her for the next step. The girl was now, at least, clean and properly dressed and fed—that much, Mrs. Bannister had insisted on, and had driven the insistence home with money, and a threat of prosecution for good measure; but these basic improvements were nothing like enough.

She had been profoundly moved by Esther Costello—by the cruel mischance which had laid her low, by the shock of her appearance, by those childish breasts so bravely sprouting into a barbaric world. She wanted to do more, much more; and since there was little to be done on the spot, it must be done in some other place, somewhere where these things enlisted effective aid as a matter of course.

Thus her thoughts began to move, and thus also, anticipating her, did Cloncraig's; for Cloncraig, prompted and prodded by Mrs. Bannister's disclosures and by the freedom of her tongue, was rediscovering its conscience, and felt the need to assuage it, for comfort's sake.

"The girl ought to go to America," said Paddy Finane, to the bar at large, finalizing their discussions. "There's doctors there can work bloody miracles. They use electric machines. They can raise the dead themselves."

Paddy turned to James Costello. "What do you say, then? Will you speak to Mrs. Bannister yourself?"

"What's that?" mumbled Costello, vague and fuddled. "Speak? What's that?"

"The girl. Esther."

"Oh—aye." He nodded. But he said no more.

"We'll all speak," said old Neil Fairlie suddenly. "Bit by bit. A hint here and a hint there. We'll put in a word, whenever we see her."

Paddy Finane considered the project. "Father Haggerty could say a word, too."

"Him, and anyone else who cares. We should do something to help the girl. If Mrs. Bannister could just take her to America, she might be cured straight away."

The whole village turned out to see them leave. This was, after all, Cloncraig's own invention, practically its own doing . . .

The car stood outside the Cloncraig Arms while Mrs. Bannister was paying her bill there: as it waited, the crowd thickened round it, staring at Esther, who sat in the back supported and cherished by a cocoon of cushions and blankets. Care and proper food (she had for months and years been living on potatoes and soup-bones) had made a certain difference to her already; she looked a little better than when Mrs. Bannister had first seen her, three weeks before, though she still had that sunken look, that desperate pallor, that air of zoo-captivity hopelessly borne.

The crowd round her was hushed by her appearance; but in

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their silence there was something more than compassion, something that peeped out here and there in a half-smile or a lift of the head. They wore an ambiguous air; it was as if they could not quite make up their minds what sort of an occasion this was to be.

Mrs. Bannister realized the truth, as soon as she came out of the front door. In Cloncraig, they were already preparing to be pleased with themselves.

Maybe, from one particular angle, they had a right to be, she thought as she began to say goodbye to those nearest to her: the girl, shamefully treated, had been recalled to their conscience, and now they were going to be quit of her, and the relief was largely of their own making.

Mrs. Bannister knew very well how they had all gone to work on her: how nearly everyone in the village, one way or another, had chipped in.

Oh yes, they had given her the full treatment, all right, flattering her as the new-style magician, the American wonder-worker, the only one able to wave the wand and produce the pumpkin. But she had not disliked the process, because she had half made up her mind already.

From the very beginning, everything about Esther's case had shocked her, impelling her to action there and then: it was not only the girl's appalling appearance, it was the whole set-up—the fecklessness, the defeated parents, the indolent cloud that had settled on all concerned, the blind eye of Cloncraig. If this was Ireland, then by God it needed the smartest kick in the pants!

That sort of feebleness and futility wouldn't do for America; and she was now an American, and must demonstrate the new standard in her own person. The fact that she was herself, by birth, a daughter of this very village of Cloncraig, made it doubly necessary to prove that the local do-nothing disease was no one's fault but their own. *Anyone* could take a good sharp tug, and start setting themselves and the world to rights . . .

In her own case, nothing stood in the way: she had money, she was free of all ties, she had no children to worry about: why then shouldn't she do what she could to help, why shouldn't she take the girl to America and see if the doctors or the clinics could so something for her? It would be a nuisance, and a very big responsibility, and it might not work; but she had nothing better to do, anyway.

The mixed motives seemed to rise up about her, prompting and supporting her as she stood on the threshold. It was flattering, in many ways, to be able to wave that particular wand, and to have the ability taken for granted.

The poor kid, like Cloncraig, was due for a break.

The papers wouldn't be likely to miss it.

It certainly wouldn't do her any harm with her friends.

Already, people—strangers—were showing that they admired her for what she was doing.

There was the faint, unacknowledged pull of the child she had never borne herself.

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She had always said, from the beginning, that " it would be nice to do something for Cloncraig."

But she was nobody's fool, and least of all her own ; and she wasn't deceiving herself, as she stood there, smiling at the leave-takers and well-wishers. She knew perfectly well that the motives were mixed, that the tapestry of her goodwill varied tremendously, some of it pure gold, some of it shoddy. But did it matter much, if in the end the kid came out the better for it ?

Mrs. Bannister got into the car and turned round to look at Esther Costello. The girl was pitiful as ever, of course ; but she seemed comfortable, and at ease.

They were ready to go.

Father Haggerty, at her elbow, murmured, " God will bless you for this," and Mrs. Bannister, with a wave, drove off towards the New World.

THEIR journey to America had, necessarily, a dog's-leg track : from Cloncraig to Dublin, from Dublin to Liverpool, from Liverpool to New York. Mrs. Bannister would have infinitely preferred to make the trip in one straight line, but there were too many things standing in the way. There were complications over the car, over her ticket, and especially over Esther Costello.

Mrs. Bannister disliked the idea of spending any more time than was necessary in England. She had a particular feeling about England. She had married an Englishman.

While she waited in the big, solid suite of the hotel, Mrs. Bannister studied Esther, and wondered about her. She had done this many times before, but now, in this pause before action, she seemed to come face to face with the odds that ruled the future.

When she watched Esther, sitting passive in one of the deep armchairs, she felt that she was watching the biggest question-mark of her life. Superficially, the girl was much improved. She had put on weight, the facial sores were healing, she was clean and neat, she looked as many normal girls of thirteen look ; she was pale, slightly awkward, and encumbered with legs too long and shoulders too thin, but there was promise of beauty in the unformed face, and the slight body held the likelihood of grace.

Esther had gained confidence in her movements, too : she seemed to have established in her mind the exact shape of the suite—which she never left—as well as the placing of its furniture, and she would sometimes go on a tour of inspection. She could now move from chair to chair and table to table, without coming to any harm ; she could walk straight from her bed to the bathroom, and, at exactly the right moment, put up her hand to reach for the doorknob.

Sometimes she would spend an hour on one circuit of the sitting-room, touching, feeling, stroking. Some things obviously puzzled her : to the telephone, for instance, she returned again and again, cupping in her hands this unknown object, frowning all the time . . . But there were other things which she accepted instantly : and when

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food was set before her, and a fork put into her hand, she ate with perfect confidence, and her fingers closed round her glass without hesitation.

In fact, she looked better, ate better, moved better, and *was* better. But what, Mrs. Bannister wondered, was going to be the full scope of that improvement?

What was the actual material like? What was this girl's true nature? If she had been normal, what sort of person would she have been? Was she dull, was she clever, was she impudent or coarse? What had she been like when her darkness fell? How much had she known, and how much had she deteriorated in the dead, lost years?

Her parents had claimed that she could read and write—but that was nearly three years ago. The priest had said that she was "lively"—but she wasn't lively now. What was this village child's real quality: was it something that could be worked on, or was it beyond improvement in any case?

Suppose, for example (and here Mrs. Bannister's thoughts strayed uneasily), suppose the doctors could do nothing, by way of a cure: could anything *else* be done for Esther Costello? Could her mind, somehow, be reached—could she be taught the deaf-and-dumb language?

A handful of other people had succeeded in this, but it had always seemed an outright miracle. How did you initiate such a miracle, not knowing what material you were working on? *And how much was she, Mrs. Bannister, going to concern herself in the effort?*

She would sit opposite Esther in the silent room, and stare at her for long minutes at a time: speculating, hoping, wondering about the future. If one half closed one's eyes, the girl was comfortingly normal—a pale, long-legged child, in a short blue dress and white socks. But one could not really close one's eyes to anything about her: she was *not* normal, she was hopelessly handicapped; she remained a terrible responsibility and, if the doctors failed, a terrible problem.

Once, in urgent need of reassurance, Mrs. Bannister experimented. She did so hesitantly. But the outcome was so heart-warming that she soon forgot her earlier reluctance.

Struck by a sudden doubt, she had wanted to find out if Esther still remembered simple words, if such a thing as a door or a chair was still known as a door or a chair, within the appropriate corner of her head.

When at last she resolved to put it to the test, the two of them were sitting in their suite before dinner: the girl relaxed in her usual armchair, with Mrs. Bannister opposite her. Here, in the evening dusk, it was warm and peaceful.

While, earlier, she had been revolving the problem in her mind, something she had once read, or a photograph she had seen, had occurred to Mrs. Bannister. It had concerned lip-reading—but lip-reading by touch and by the vibration of sound.

She must have read it or seen it a very long time ago, but now it had returned to her, pricking her imagination. If the two of them

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experimented on the same lines, it would mean that Esther would put her hand over Mrs. Bannister's mouth, to try to *feel* what she was saying.

Mrs. Bannister had thought a lot about it, and now she was going to try it.

Mrs. Bannister glanced round the room. They wanted a word, she thought. A simple word, a word the girl was sure to have known in the past. They wanted one word only, and then she could put Esther on trial with it.

Between them was the electric fire, glowing softly in the twilight of the room. On an impulse, Mrs. Bannister crossed to Esther and, putting a hand under her arm, raised her, as she always did when she wished to indicate that it was time to move or to walk.

Esther rose obediently, and stood waiting. Mrs. Bannister led her the two steps to the electric fire, took Esther's hands in her own, and held them out to the warmth.

She watched the small hands uncurling as they felt the glow of the fire-bar. Then she raised Esther's right hand, and put it over her own mouth. She felt, with secret pleasure, the young fingers gripping her trustfully about the lips and chin. She spoke into the hand, enunciating with slow care: "Fire." And again: "Fire."

She repeated the whole manœuvre, holding Esther's hand to the warmth, and then clasping it to her own mouth, and saying "Fire," slowly and with special emphasis. At the third time, Esther's face suddenly brightened, and she nodded.

Mrs. Bannister repeated: "Fire," and felt the small fingers gripping and curling round her mouth, as if the girl feared to lose this linking word, which had suddenly reached her through lips she had never seen and never touched before: as if she clung desperately to the promise of speech.

Tears came to Mrs. Bannister's eyes as she felt the fingers continuing to grope and to welcome . . . She repeated, yet once again: "Fire," for sheer pleasure in this warm communion. The hand on her mouth, like a baby's clutch, was a sensual blessing.

At the repetition, Esther nodded once more. And then she did something else, something Mrs. Bannister had not bargained for. She opened her own mouth, and stood tense for a moment, her lips trembling, her throat working under the smooth childish skin. Then a sound came from between her lips.

It was not the sort of sound Mrs. Bannister had ever heard before. It was something between a groan and a cheep, ill-pitched and shapeless, though produced with mortal effort. But it *was* a sound, a single sound: to an eager mind, it was a word; and, with great love and faith, it was the word: "Fire."

By contrast with this moving moment, which seemed to put a seal of hope upon the future, the Atlantic crossing to New York was a frightful ordeal.

Mrs. Bannister spent virtually the whole voyage in the cabin, leaving it now and then for a brief walk round the heaving, deserted

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deck. She took all her meals with Esther. Only on the last day, when the westerly gale died, did she emerge from the self-contained, painful world below.

But she emerged, oddly, to find herself something of a heroine. Whatever the source, the ship seemed to know all about Esther and herself, and when she appeared in the ornate, crowded bar for a drink before lunch, she found herself fêted by a number of total strangers who seemed as eager to hear the story from her own lips, as they were to pay for that drink, and the next, and the next.

It might have been a familiar ship-board routine to film stars and politicians, but to Mrs. Bannister it was all novel, and all wonderful. There was immense exhilaration in thus emerging as a public figure, in spreading butterfly wings and finding that they had the world's recognition and the world's acclaim. It was the first time that anything of this sort had happened to her: and the fact that at its core was hidden so strange an object, the blind girl in the womb of the ship, seemed to give the whole happy session a secondary aspect, one of dedication.

Mrs. Bannister crossed the cabin floor, and laid her hand gently on Esther's forehead. The girl started, as she always did when she was touched suddenly, and then her brow relaxed and she smiled, and put up her own hand to cover the visiting one.

"Only one more night, honey," said Mrs. Bannister. "Then we'll get you right, for sure."

Every mile the ship made westwards, every turn of the screw, seemed to be bringing them nearer to sanity and hope.

There was one more item in the voyage, and it was added the same night, when Mrs. Bannister left Esther and returned to the saloon. There, the last ship's concert was just getting under way; and after it, at the suggestion of an old senator (who made a speech in which the words "little lady" occurred eleven times), a collection was taken for Esther Costello. It was, in the senator's phrase, "to help the little lady in her sore trouble."

The takings were handed to Mrs. Bannister, by the purser, when she was squaring her bar-account next morning.

They totalled seventeen hundred dollars.

The New York papers picked up the scent very quickly. Mrs. Bannister had hardly reached the hotel overlooking Central Park, ordered coffee, and put Esther to bed, before two reporters and a photographer were hammering at the door, in search of the story they were later to headline as:

STRICKEN COLLEEN SEEKS SIGHT, HEARING, SPEECH.

Mrs. Bannister, whose home for thirty years had been Boston, had never cared for New York until this moment. But so ready was its welcome, and so flattering its notice, that she found herself warming to it immediately.

She had visualized a couple of days in New York, and then the journey home—home to Boston, where there were friends to welcome her, and doctors to take Esther in hand. In the end, she stayed a

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fortnight. She did not put Esther under treatment, since this might have prolonged their stay indefinitely; instead, the time was passed agreeably in shopping and in newspaper interviews.

Telegrams from two friends in Boston indicated that the news had been picked up there, and that the same sort of welcome awaited her in her home town. But it gave her, besides the first feeling of satisfaction, a small twinge of doubt. This part of the adventure was fine. But what if there were an anti-climax, what if Esther proved to be beyond medical aid? How would the papers play that one?

It was this uncertainty that made her, within a few hours, pack up and put herself and Esther on the train for Boston. Her common sense, of which she had plenty, told her that she must now stop fooling around, and get to work properly.

Esther, having been helped down to the platform, stood as usual, in patient composure: a fair-haired schoolgirl in a short blue dress, pale, unsmiling, and still. She had an inward look about the eyes, but that was all that marked her out from the world.

"Pardon me," said a hovering newspaperman to Mrs. Bannister. "Can you let me have something for the *Star-Telegram*?" He jerked his head towards Esther. "I guess that's the girl. How old is she?"

He questioned, and Mrs. Bannister answered readily, for some time; he was a tall and personable young man, and his obvious interest was pleasing. There was much that he was curious about—the sort of home Esther had come from, the details of the accident, the plans for helping her now.

Finally the newspaperman finished his questions with: "What gave you the idea, in the first place?"

Mrs. Bannister smiled. "I just wanted to help her, I guess. It was the village where I was born."

"It's a wonderful thing to do," said the newspaperman cordially, "and I hope it works out." He closed his notebook. "Thanks a lot, Mrs. Bannister."

"Sure you've got that right?" asked Mrs. Bannister. "B-A-N-N-I-S-T-E-R."

His eyes flickered over her face for a second, knowing and yet non-committal. "I'll get it right," he said, after a moment. "Don't you fret."

The things they now did to Esther Costello would not have disgraced a progressive African tribe whose witch-doctors, competing against the unknown, pooled their traditional arts and rivalled each other in inventing new ones.

First they looked at her, outside and in, from every angle; shaking their heads the while, and waggling their beards. They X-rayed her head and her neck: they peered down her throat: they wormed their way into her ears: they stared with bright lights at her eyes.

Then they started active warfare. They shaved off nearly all her hair. They fed her strange meals, and starved her for weeks at a time. They took out two of her wisdom teeth. They gave her every

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variety of shock-therapy that had yet been devised. They tried to startle her with loud noises, they jabbed her with instruments. They removed a two-inch circle of the dome of her skull, and wired it back on again with three millimetres' more clearance.

They psycho-analysed her, so far as this could be done without answers of any sort, endeavouring to find out what she liked and what she feared. They tried the effect of pain, involving treatment to the soles of the feet, and pleasure, which was focused elsewhere. They gave her chicken-pox on purpose, and measles by mistake. They brought her temperature down to eighty-six degrees, then made her blood boil with fever. They dipped her in thermal baths, and planted blisters at the nape of her neck, and gave her generous injections of insulin.

As a climax to all this, they subjected her to an immense electric shock which prostrated her for a week. Then they sat back, and waited.

When she came to, Esther Costello could neither see, hear, nor speak.

To the doctors, this appeared a particularly offensive outcome, and they would have tried again, with louder noises, thicker whips. But Mrs. Bannister, following from day to day and month to month the frightful campaign she herself initiated, had already had enough.

Each time she had gone to see Esther in hospital (where the girl had spent nearly a year) she had hoped that the fearful things they were doing to her would justify themselves by success; and each time, when there was only failure to record, she was left with a diminished belief in the rightness of what they were doing, as well as a sense of shame for the past.

After the electric shock-treatment, she knew that they must do no more . . . It did not matter that she was closely involved in this failure, and that it meant the public defeat of all her hopes. There was an end to every journey, whether it was down the road to the post office, or the three thousand miles from Cloncraig to Boston: and people of common sense and normal will knew where that end was, and what you did when you got to it. You turned back.

Thanking the doctors, and settling their not inconsiderable bills, she took Esther home to her Commonwealth-Avenue apartment. There she gave an interview to the newspapers, which duly recorded NO HOPE FOR ESTHER COSTELLO (for the name was now widely known), and let the matter drop. Then she sat down to think.

She was thinking of the desperate disappointment which the doctors' reports had brought, and of how best she could equate the future with her hopes and with her conscience. As had happened on the ship, she was aware all the time of Esther, hidden somewhere within the apartment: she knew exactly how the girl would be looking at this moment, sitting in an armchair in her small room, with its simplified furniture and its lack of hazard. The bell-push was close under her hand, the way to the bathroom had been memorized for many weeks past, the world for her was blessedly at peace: this day was just like another day, with no more shocks, no more crude manipulation.

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Esther was nearly fifteen now, and, having recovered from her time in hospital, was growing very pretty; the slight body had filled out, and it was obvious that she would be, within a measurable number of years, a young woman of singular attraction. It had been all right about her "growing-up," thought Mrs. Bannister: the girl had taken the whole thing for granted, and had dealt with it competently.

Mrs. Bannister had forgotten that Esther had lived, as a child, so close to nature, surrounded by farmyard practices and peasant frankness. That worry was over—or rather (she smiled to herself) there was only one other thing to worry about, in *that* connection . . . It was quite a thought that one day she might have to explain sex to this pretty child. Or would that be unnecessary also?

But, apart from the vague future, what was to be done *now*?

She herself was determined, somehow, to justify what she had done; so that no one could sneer or laugh at her, and the newspapers would see that it was *really* something after all, and Esther would live again.

IT was a curious year, the year that now ensued; a year of retreat, a year of dedication. Many things happened, in the outside world, that might have distracted her. But for Mrs. Bannister, there was only one person, and one idea—Esther Costello, and the need to reach her mind and be reached by it.

Many times, when the fund of patience which this demanded was drawn wire-thin, she doubted the rightness of what she was doing. Her new decision—as with the original one, two years ago in Cloncraig—had been a compound of many factors and many feelings: she had wanted to rescue Esther, she had wanted to finish what she had started, she had wanted to retrieve the public defeat which the newspapers had summed up in words: NO HOPE FOR ESTHER COSTELLO.

Nor would there ever be a dividend for her, in any event. That was obvious. Success would tie her to Esther for life; and failure would be a waste of time so absurd and so mortifying that she would never be able to trust herself with a fundamental decision again.

But still she laboured, and hoped, and watched. When the amazing results began to come, when Esther grew to humanity again, it seemed no more than was owed to all the immense care that had gone before. For years afterwards, when people talked of "miracles," Mrs. Bannister was always secretly annoyed. This thing had been *worked* for: nothing so lazy, so feeble, so inept as a miracle, had had any part in it.

The fantastic story started at the local Deaf-and-Dumb Institute; and there, the first thing they found out about Esther Costello was that she *could* spell.

At Mrs. Bannister's suggestion, they began with the blessed word "fire," which she had been able to "get through" to Esther while they had been waiting at the hotel in Liverpool, and which she had answered so movingly.

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Then they combined it with something else : whenever they said " fire," they tapped four times in the palm of her hand, for the word's four letters.

This puzzled and defeated Esther for many weeks, until they began to fear that the whole conception of spelling, which had been hers five years before, had vanished in the blank intervening time. But there came a day when she suddenly smiled, and tapped four times back, and nodded, and tried to make four separate noises in her throat.

Then they taught her the four letters of the word " fire," using the normal deaf-and-dumb sign language on her fingers and palm.

To " fire " they presently added " water "—dipping her hand in a bowl of water, giving five taps, and then going on to the individual letters themselves. The fact that " fire " and " water " had two letters in common, " r " and " e," seemed to give Esther tremendous pleasure. Next came the word " mouth," and thus they had, with these three simple words, taught her eleven different letters, including all the five vowels.

These eleven letters took nearly a third of a year to communicate. But after that, progress was a good deal quicker.

Mrs. Bannister learned at the same time, and soon it was she, and she only, who spelled out letters and words on Esther's hand, so that the girl could get used to her touch and they could establish the essential sympathy. They spent hours together, whispering, tapping, pressing the shape of letters on to each other's hands.

It soon became clear that Esther was a girl of quick intelligence, and quick humour too : she was seizing on this child's guessing game, which was so enormously important to her, because it satisfied many things within her—not only her hunger for the outside world, but the lively spirit she had left so far behind.

There came a day when Mrs. Bannister told Esther what had happened to her in the past.

They had been sitting together in the apartment, having their usual two hours' practice—a daily routine of spelling out difficult words, learning new ones, and trying to increase the speed of their communication. They were now both very quick at this, and already there was developing between them a kind of shorthand—the letter R for " are," 2 for " to," MT for " empty "—which would make it quicker still in the future. All such tricks seemed to bring wonderful pleasure to Esther, as if between them they were fooling the whole pedantic world. There had been a pause in their movements, and then Esther suddenly gripped Mrs. Bannister's arm, and spelled out : " Where are my eyes ? "

Mrs. Bannister frowned, thinking at first that Esther was either " practising " a sentence with no particular significance, or initiating another of her childish jokes. But the girl repeated the question, and to emphasize it she put up her hand and covered both her eyes, as if with a bandage.

Mrs. Bannister paused, and then spelled : " They were hurt."

" How ? " asked Esther immediately.

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"There was an—" began Mrs. Bannister. Then she hesitated. "Explosion" might be too difficult. She altered it to: "A bang."

Esther thought for a moment. Then her hand went up again, and touched in turn her ears and her mouth, questioningly.

Mrs. Bannister said: "Yes."

"How long back?" was the next question.

"Five years," said Mrs. Bannister.

There was a longer pause now, while Esther appeared to be thinking. Five years must seem a lifetime—as indeed it was.

Then came another question: "Will it get better?"

"Yes. Soon." Mrs. Bannister had no hesitation in giving such an answer, though it had not an atom of truth in it. In Esther's blind world, there could be little to live on save hope, and hope must never be denied her.

She had expected that the girl would continue on the same subject, but Esther's next phrase was a surprise.

"The other children?"

Mrs. Bannister did not understand at first, and then she remembered. There had been other children with Esther when the "bang" happened. Perhaps she had been wondering about them for five years . . . It seemed better to tell the truth.

"They were killed."

There was another long pause, and then a small sob shook the girl, and tears started from her eyes and fell down her cheeks. At a loss, Mrs. Bannister waited, pressing Esther's hand. Then she added: "It was very quick."

Esther nodded. Her face now seemed to be remembering something, something that perhaps she should have remembered before. She drew the next sentence slowly, as if from a very old lesson indeed.

"They are in Heaven," said Esther.

Then another quick question:

"Where is my mother?"

"She is far away," said Mrs. Bannister. "This is a new country."

"Who are you?"

"A friend."

Now came the longest pause of all, full of the past and the future, and then Esther leant across and laid her cheek softly on Mrs. Bannister's. Both of them could feel the tears on Esther's face, and presently the girl drew back and, with a heart-rending smile—half apology, half loving trust—wiped off the tears with her fingertips. Then she spelled out, slowly and with special emphasis:

"You are very good."

And she clutched Mrs. Bannister's hand as it if were a priest's hand holding the sacrament, as if the two of them were lovers.

When it was spring once more, and warm, Esther and Mrs. Bannister tried the outside world again. Hitherto, they had been very little out of doors: but now it was April, and the time of invitation: the spring air, and the trees along the Avenue, and the

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sunshine, all beckoned them to step outside their retreat—and when they did so, the outside was not difficult at all.

They walked in the sunshine, or sat under the trees on Boston Common. This was what Esther seemed to enjoy, above all else. She was content to sit for hours on one of the smooth wooden benches halfway up the hill, her face turned towards the warm breeze that blew in from the sea, her young body stretched at ease, her right hand clasped in Mrs. Bannister's, or flickering as her fingers "talked."

Often she and Mrs. Bannister fed the pigeons, and there was always a special joy in Esther's face when she could coax one of the birds to perch on her shoulder or her wrist, or even, as sometimes happened, to lie still under the stroking of her gentle hand.

When the bird finally fluttered in her grasp, and then flew away, Esther always spelled out the word "free."

She and Mrs. Bannister talked all the time. Esther was now sixteen, and growing lovely: her slight body had filled out gracefully, and her face, warmed and animated, had a young glow upon it that would one day be distracting. She was becoming a woman, and she could not fail to know it: indeed, she was immensely curious about all this growing process, and what her face and body looked like, and her questions to Mrs. Bannister darted this way and that as the answers fed her secret thoughts.

More than once Mrs. Bannister noticed Esther touching her flanks and then her breasts, with inquisitive, almost wondering fingers. It came as a shock to Mrs. Bannister to realize, as she did vividly at that moment, that Esther might one day, in marriage, come to know and welcome another person's hands upon her.

Sex . . . Esther skirted round the question, but the question was there all the time. She knew about babies— babies were just young animals, and human procreation was for her a simple variation on farmyard practice. That much had clearly been in her mind already, when she was struck.

What she did not know, and what she was avid to learn was her own place in this scheme, her own chance of womanhood. The sentences would come pattering out like the questions of a shy, persistent child.

She was, perhaps, more frank than she would have been if the words had actually been spoken. Mrs. Bannister hoped—without much conviction—that the answers she gave were enough to allay curiosity. If Esther, at the age of sixteen, were to start exploring in any direction, it would be altogether too much to deal with.

It was on the same spot on Boston Common, under the trees in the warm summer sunshine, that events, for both of them, presently took a fresh and decisive turn.

They had been sitting on their favourite bench, halfway up the hill: to Esther, the dappled sun on her face was a warm blessing, while for Mrs. Bannister the hum of traffic from the lower edge of the Common made a lazy, soothing containment for her thoughts. Esther held a pigeon cushioned in one hand, while with the other

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she fed it crumbs from a paper bag : her face was intent and serious, her movements gently precise.

Presently a tall young man, hatless, in a flannel suit and a brisk bow tie, glanced sideways at them as he passed, and checked his step with a frown. Then he turned back, and stood above them, still looking puzzled. Finally he said : " Mrs. Bannister ? "

" Yes," said Mrs. Bannister tentatively. Then she recognized him. It was the reporter from the *Star-Telegram*, the one who had met them at South Station, nearly three years ago. She smiled, since he was young, and undoubtedly good-looking, and said : " Hullo, there . . . "

He smiled in answer. " Remember me ? "

" Surely. Are you still on the paper ? "

" Yes." His eyes turned towards Esther, and grew puzzled again. " But . . . Is this—her ? "

" Yes—it's Esther Costello. Didn't you recognize her ? "

" Only just." His blue eyes in the pleasant, assured face were gazing at Esther with frank admiration. " I didn't even know she was still in America."

Mrs. Bannister laid her fingers on Esther's wrist, and spelled out a sentence or two. Esther looked up in the young man's direction, and smiled.

Confused, he smiled back, and said : " Hullo."

Mrs. Bannister shook her head. " No, she still can't hear. Or see."

" Good grief ! " His face was now a study in wonderment. " You mean—but you were talking to her. How did *you* learn ? "

" I learned." She smiled up at him, and then, on an impulse, patted the bench beside her. " It's quite a story. Would you like to hear it ? "

He nodded vigorously, still looking at Esther. " Sure would. She's beautiful, too." He transferred his gaze to Mrs. Bannister. " I'm Barry Grant," he said, and sat down at her side. " Tell me what's been happening."

She told him the story, and her own part in it, while he watched her and Esther by turns, and interrupted only to say, at one point : " It's a hell of a thing you took on."

There was in his face a most agreeable admiration—and the face itself, Mrs. Bannister could not help noticing, was both attractive and intelligent.

Presently she broke off her story, to interject : " What do you do on the paper ? "

" Reporter—leg-man—anything that comes up. I'm still learning."

Mrs. Bannister smiled at him. " What's a leg-man ? " She was not beyond flirting, obliquely, with a young man of this quality.

Grant smiled in answer. " The one that does the work." He turned back to Esther, studying her face and then her figure with an appraisement that was somehow not offensive. " That's a terrific story," he said at last. " I'd like to write it. Would you mind ? "

" No," said Mrs. Bannister, after consideration. " Not if you think it's worth it."

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" I'll say it's worth it."

There was a pause between them. She saw that he was already thinking hard—sorting phrases, choosing adjectives—and she kept silence momentarily, not wishing to interrupt. Presently Grant said: " How long did it take you ? "

" More than a year. It was slow at the start—I had to learn myself, from the very beginning. Like going to school again."

He said, looking at Esther's pretty face: " You did a wonderful job. Does she know I'm sitting here ? "

" Yes. I told her who you were, and she knows I'm talking to someone." She took Esther's hand again, and there was another pause while the two of them exchanged sentences. Then Mrs. Bannister said: " She wants to know what you look like."

Barry Grant grinned at her. " What do you say to that one ? "

Mrs. Bannister smiled back, enjoying the moment. " I guess I'll keep that in *our* language."

Grant got up, his expression serious again. " I must go. But I'd like to write it . . . Can I call you up if I get stuck ? "

" Surely—do that. Or come round and see us." She gave him the number of the apartment, and then nodded good-bye. " Nice to see you again."

" More than that, for me." Like an excited child's, his face was beginning to express his wonder once more, and then he checked it, as if remembering some rule about not showing emotion. He said, curtly: " Be seeing you," and walked determinedly away down the path, his body lithe, his arms swinging.

He seemed to take a lot of the sunlight with him.

Barry Grant waited in the *Star-Telegram* newsroom, his eyes on the open door leading to the news-editor's office. Since he had patience, energy, and enthusiasm, all in ample supply, and he could write as well, he was likely to succeed. But no one had told him this, so far. Least of all Ryan, the news-editor, who now—and Grant jumped to his feet—was free.

The piece that the *Star-Telegram* carried two days later, over the first-time by-line " by Barry Grant," was, in its own way, a minor classic of newspaper writing. True, it was not straight reporting, or anything like it; it took sides, it demanded sympathy, it aimed straight at the American heart.

But as a story, it was a triumph, exhibiting brilliantly the two elements in Esther Costello's progress so far—the small miracle that had allowed her to live with the outside world again, and the major personal undertaking that was Mrs. Bannister's part in it.

It was all there, as Grant himself had said. It was further limelit by three photographs which, by luck or skill, caught exactly Esther's young beauty, Mrs. Bannister's handsome competence, and their hard-won joint communion.

The presentation was so good that the Esther Costello story was bound to catch alight again. It made, mainly, a local sensation, but within those limits it took the town by storm.

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There was a solid and persuasive press follow-up—interviews, leaders, more photographs. There were letters to the papers; there was an "Esther Costello Christmas Fund" which provided for local blind children. The Institute where Esther and Mrs. Bannister had originally studied, benefited under at least four wills. Mrs. Bannister talked on the radio, Barry Grant wrote three more articles.

A few weeks later, Mrs. Bannister returned home from shopping to find some unusual visitors waiting for her. They were two nuns, sitting side by side, uncertainly, on the edge of her couch. There was an old one and a young one: forty years separated them, but they were alike in shyness, softness of voice, and determination.

The old one came straight to the point—or so she seemed to think. "It's our Day," she began, as if that single word *day* would explain the whole thing. "The Wednesday after Easter Day. All the parents come, and we have speeches. We want you to be there—and Esther too, perhaps—and tell us your story."

Mrs. Bannister was never to forget that "Day" at the convent. Not only was it the turning-point in her joint life with Esther Costello, marking the hour of which she could say afterwards (though only to herself): "That was when it all started;" but it was a deep emotional experience as well, shattering in its revelation of how the human heart, though wrung and torn by pity, can transform these into a fearful joy in a single uplifting moment.

The way in which she and Esther were received, and the way in which their presence worked upon all those that watched, so that in the end there was nothing in the whole vast reception-hall save an embracing love for the two of them—these things dictated the future even while they took shape themselves, as decisive as birth and death within a small family.

They arrived early at the convent, to be met first by an attendant frieze of nuns big and small, and excited children peering round corners at their approach, and then by the Mother Superior, a gracious personage on whom the habit of command sat conspicuously well. Mrs. Bannister had coached Esther very carefully, not only in what she would have to do but in the sort of things which would be going on around her from moment to moment.

They were ushered on to the platform, above a huge hall in which sat nearly five hundred people—children of the school, parents, priests, casual visitors attracted by Esther's presence.

Mrs. Bannister took her seat, and immediately began describing to Esther the scene around them: she could not be unaware of the intense, keyed-up interest in what she was doing. She did not exactly play up to this audience, but she consciously included them in what she was doing; there was in her manner a certain showmanship which her more percipient friends would have recognized. Belle Bannister, they would have said, wasn't missing *this* trick.

Mrs. Bannister had, of course, prepared what she wanted to say, but even without her notes she would have found it easy: she knew already that she was talking to friends. She gave them the story from the beginning, in simple narrative.

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There was not a sound in the hall as she spoke: occasionally she turned towards Esther, to point what she was saying, and Esther was always the perfect illustration for each phrase and each word—lovely and immobile, her face tranquil, her blind gaze steadfast; the focus now of a thousand eyes, and hundreds of advancing hearts.

"I shall tell Esther about this wonderful gathering," said Mrs. Bannister, nearing the end of her story. "I shall tell her that all of you"—she hesitated, and looked towards the Mother Superior, sitting a few paces from her—"that all of you are with her, that all of you are praying for her."

The Mother Superior nodded very gently at these last words: a royal acquiescence that no single person in the hall missed.

"I shall tell her," said Mrs. Bannister, emboldened, "that you all love her."

If the Mother Superior had not nodded again, approving this last claim, it might have exceeded—by a single heartbeat—what was permissible: as it was, every child present, and then every adult, seemed to draw sobbing breath to endorse it. The great wave of applause that followed flowed towards the platform, and then faded as Mrs. Bannister leant towards Esther, and died to nothing as she took the girl's hand in her own.

Turning her head, Mrs. Bannister said: "I am telling her now."

The audience craned forward in their seats, amid an electric silence, to watch her fingers moving. There were some seconds of hesitation and doubt—broken by an occasional sob from an overwrought child—while Mrs. Bannister repeated the words she had spelled: her trembling hands had made her touch uncertain. But there came a huge sigh as Esther's face was seen to soften to a smile; and then a wild outburst of clapping as she leant forward and held out both her arms to the audience she could not see.

Here and there in the body of the hall, voices called to her; here and there, answering arms were held towards Esther, as if to complete an embrace. It was a loving clamour, like the clamour of penitents seeking to heal and to be healed.

Mrs. Bannister happened to catch sight of the Mother Superior's face at that moment, and saw in it a division of desire that was as moving as anything else that the moment could show. She was patently affected by what was happening—so much was obvious; the proud, capable face was softened, the eyes bright with unaccustomed tears.

But against that, she was clearly striving to remember that this hall was full of children who were in her charge—and the children must, as a first necessity, be protected against these moments of tempest. Love and tears could always have their place; emotion and hysteria must never do so.

But it was not an occasion that could be immediately controlled, and so she allowed it to run much of its course; and then, as Mrs. Bannister watched, her face settled again into its cool competence, and very slowly she stood up.

A gradual stillness rose to meet her; the movement in the hall

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Higson (at last winging a Pheasant, after missing right and left all day). "AH, HA! KNOCKED HIM OVER THAT TIME, JENKINS!"

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abated, the sounds fell away to nothing. It was not an easy silence, but it could pass for tranquillity if one forgot what had just been happening.

"All of us must be very grateful to Mrs. Bannister," the Mother Superior began. Her voice was measured, and consciously calm—a sedative voice that served to emphasize the storm of feeling that had just swept them all. "We must thank her, not only for coming here to tell us her story, but for the wonderful work she has done. I want you all to remember"—she was speaking now to her children—"how much love and faith she must have had in her heart, to do all this for another person, a stranger.

"We must try to copy her—and to copy Esther too, who has been patient, and brave, and determined, for so many long years. You all know that she cannot see you; you know that she cannot hear what I am saying. But Mrs. Bannister will tell her afterwards what has been said, and how much"—she hesitated—"how much we all love her."

Some renewed clapping interrupted her at this point, gradually fading as the Mother Superior held up her hand.

"There are six children here today," she concluded, "who have won prizes this term, and this is the moment when they will come up to the platform to receive them. The prizes will be presented by—Esther Costello."

At that there was so great a gasp, of joy and fear, throughout the hall, that the Mother Superior felt all her doubts returning.

As Esther, guided by Mrs. Bannister, stood up and came forward, the voices and the cheering began to gather again: the whole audience, as if aware that this was a crucial moment, was willing Esther to make it a successful one.

The first girl, a small child in a white dress, advanced up the steps of the platform, reached Esther, and took from her hands the proffered book. Above her head, Esther was seen to be smiling. The child walked off the platform again.

The audience sighed, for relief at this simple outcome, and then applauded. Perhaps it would all be as easy as this.

Mrs. Bannister put into Esther's hand the second book, for the second child. The second child, nervous, hung back at the edge of the platform: and while she was still some yards away, Esther smiled again and held out the book—forward into space. There was a frightful moment of emptiness, when nothing happened: the smile left Esther's face, to be succeeded by a look of doubt and fear.

Then the child, prompted by a nun, advanced, almost at a run, snatched the book from Esther, and clattered down the stairs again, already whimpering.

In the audience, other children began to cry.

Mrs. Bannister took Esther's hand and spoke to her. It was wonderful to see the girl's face regain confidence: it was more than wonderful, it was violently moving—and there had been enough that was moving, for every soul in the audience, that afternoon.

Down in the body of the hall, an intolerable suspense grew as

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the Mother Superior read out the third child's name ; on the platform, those in authority looked towards Mrs. Bannister as towards a saviour.

But this time, Mrs. Bannister remained standing by Esther's side, and guided her all through the presentation, with an arm around her shoulder. The applause at the end seemed confused—some for the child (who was unconcerned and co-operative), some for Esther, some for Mrs. Bannister's demonstrated care.

It was as if the audience itself was becoming unstable, uncertain of what it wanted to happen. That arm round the shoulder retold, in one single gesture, the whole story which had so moved them all, a little earlier. They wanted it to remain where it was. It was *their* arm, as well as Mrs. Bannister's.

Mrs. Bannister stayed with Esther while the fourth child received her prize. Once again, all went smoothly. Then she sat down, leaving Esther standing alone once more.

By mischance, the fifth child was already crying uncontrollably when she reached the platform. She was older than the others—about fourteen, with a pretty, dark face that now looked hopelessly distraught : she must have been living the past few minutes at some special pitch of intensity. When she was within a few yards of Esther, she stopped dead, as if she could walk no farther.

There was a look of pain and horror on her face. It was clear that she could not bear to come any closer to the person who had inspired her pitiful tears.

The Mother Superior, frowning, motioned her forward. She shook her head, all the time staring at Esther who was waiting, patiently, book in hand. The two of them stood thus for a full ten seconds. Then suddenly the girl turned, and darted off the platform, and out of the hall, crying loudly as if pursued.

If anything did pursue her, it was the audience's violent hatred at this betrayal. People like us—so their thoughts seemed to clamour —people with eyes and ears should not fail people like Esther Costello, who have neither of these blessings, and who still make so valiant an effort to play their normal part.

They could not find anything to applaud, at this destroying moment, so they waited in charged silence. They watched Esther fearfully. She still held the book. Someone had to receive it from her.

Mrs. Bannister stood up, and with no further word or sign, took the book from Esther's hands. Esther smiled the smile she had given to the rest of the children. The audience, partners in this public deception, found relief again in anguished applause.

Then the last child, the eldest of all, mounted the steps of the platform as the Mother Superior announced her name. She was nervous—there was no one in the whole room who was not—but she advanced resolutely towards Esther : a tall, slight figure in a white dress, about fifteen years old, walking still with a child's awkwardness. Reaching Esther, she held out her hand and touched the book she was to receive. Esther smiled, and released it into her grasp.

The book dropped with a frightful thump on the platform floor.

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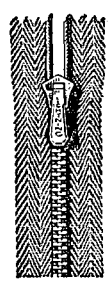

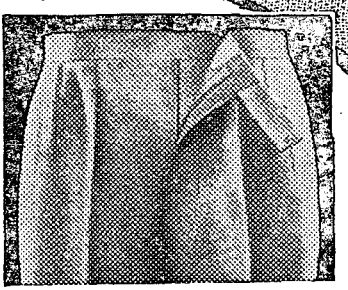

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Esther must have felt the impact, or else the book touched her foot, for her expression changed immediately. Her hands groped forwards inquiringly, and encountered the girl's empty ones. There was upon her working face a look of such ruined despair that many people in the audience cried out at the sight of it.

The Mother Superior rose, as did Mrs. Bannister. But it was the child herself who retrieved the whole moment, with sudden, moving grace. She took a pace forward, threw her arms round Esther, and hugged her fervently. Above her head, Esther's face, hardly less childish, melted first into doubt and then into a delighted smile.

They stood embraced for a long moment, while the audience went off its head.

There was some element in the thunderous applause which now followed that seemed to knit the whole occasion together into an ecstatic success. It was the sort of applause that tried to express everything.

There was tremendous relief in it. There was pity for Esther, admiration for Mrs. Bannister, and thanks for the child who had redeemed them all. There was a plea for forgiveness, because it was they who had been the promoters of all this long ordeal. There was, above everything else, love for Esther Costello, which they must demonstrate at all costs.

The applause filled the hall, growing, echoing. The audience began to move towards the platform, where Mrs. Bannister, Esther, and the child now stood in a line together. Here and there, people in the first rows stretched out their hands, trying to touch them. Then those in front started to invade the platform itself, while the voices and the clapping still rose in great waves behind them.

It was as if, for this one moment, the whole human world was flowing towards Esther Costello, striving to reach the blind girl who was the adored centre of their lives. The tumult was still at its height when the Mother Superior gave the signal for the ceremony to end.

In the quiet of the Mother Superior's office, the man—middle-aged, short, strongly-built—walked up and down with quick, energetic steps.

"I asked if I could see you alone," he said. He had a tough, rasping voice, a voice of executive command, but now it had lost much of its authority, and seemed to be urging a cause that did not accord with toughness at all.

"That was a wonderful experience for me. I have a little girl at school here"—he glanced again at Esther—"a little girl in full health, thank God."

"How old is she?" asked Mrs. Bannister. She had no idea what was coming, but for some reason she wanted to help him, in spite of her feeling of drained exhaustion.

"Just nine years old. That was a wonderful experience for me," he repeated. "I felt as though"—he was groping—"as though I

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wanted to make a thank-offering—for my little girl, for the gift of sight." He turned aside, blew his nose, and then faced Mrs. Bannister squarely. "You should go all around the country," he said. "Coast to coast. Tell everybody about it."

"That would be a very big undertaking," said Mrs. Bannister.

The man nodded. "I know. And I'd like to help out. You must have had a lot of expenses with this thing already. As well as a lot of worry."

"There've been expenses, certainly. I hadn't thought about it."

"That's because you're a wonderful woman. I'd like to help," he repeated. "You ought to establish a fund. Not just for her. For all the blind." He stopped in front of Esther, looking down at her almost hungrily. "She's such a lovely kid. You saw what we felt about her. Think what you and she could do for the blind."

"That might be true."

"I'd like to help," he said, for the third time. Suddenly he dipped into his pocket, drew out a piece of paper, and held it towards her. Mrs. Bannister saw, without surprise, that it was a cheque, already made out.

It reached her hand, and rested there. "But I can't take this," said Mrs. Bannister, no longer unmoved. Her astonished eyes had just noted that the cheque was for twenty thousand dollars. "It's too generous—it's too much. I won't know what to do with it at all."

"It's a lot of money," the man agreed. "I'm not all that rich

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either. I guess you realize the way I feel, now." There was relief and satisfaction in his voice, as if he were reaching out towards her, eager to share the peace he had won. "But I know you'll take care of it all right. For Esther's sake. For all the blind."

Mrs. Bannister had lost count of the number of their meetings, as she had of a good many other things during the past year. It must now be close on thirty . . .

During the year, Esther and Mrs. Bannister had both travelled very widely, throughout the eastern half of the country, raising funds for the blind; and wherever they went, the sequence was always the same—a warm welcome, a tremendous upsurge of emotion during each appearance together, a final explosion of feeling when Esther took her leave. That was, naturally, the moment when the hat went round. So violent a climax had to be given relief.

Usually, Mrs. Bannister lectured, and then "talked" to Esther demonstrating how easily the two of them could communicate with each other. Then Esther would "make a speech" herself, spelling the words to Mrs. Bannister, who would relay them, sentence by sentence, to the audience. Sometimes Esther would answer questions, using the same relay system.

But it did not really matter what she did, as long as she was available to stand there on the platform—deaf, mute, blind, and yet on the other hand young, shapely, and beautiful. For Esther, at seventeen, had blossomed into a startling loveliness that was stunning in its impact.

She was every woman's longed-for child, every man's favourite daughter—or the secret focus of his desires. Everywhere, people came to watch, to hear—and to give.

It was good to be so well-known, so widely acclaimed, thought Mrs. Bannister; it was good to be a ready-made hit, wherever one went. When she talked to the newspapers (and that was on very many occasions), Mrs. Bannister used to describe their activities as "focusing attention on the needs of the blind:" when she addressed an audience, she borrowed the phrase of their first benefactor, the man with twenty thousand dollars to give away, and called for thank-offerings for the gift of sight.

She called for them, and she got them: the money flowed in all the time, from scores of different sources—collections, donations, bequests. Men dug deep into their wallets, women peered into their purses, children rifled their own money-boxes—all for Esther Costello. It was astonishing how people responded to this simple urge to give.

They lived comfortably, she and Esther: after all her trouble and worry, after the expenses she had been put to, after all the hard work, Mrs. Bannister felt entitled to a reasonable standard of luxury. True, she had passed a lot of the money on, to various blind charities; but the rest—and that was plenty—was still there, in the "fund."

She hadn't made up her mind about the fund. It might all be distributed—later. It might serve as the nucleus of some kind of trust. It might just be a bank-balance for the two of them.

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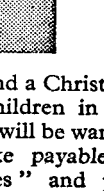

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After all, Esther would never be able to earn her own living. She had to be taken care of. One might almost say that this was the first priority, that the "needs of the blind" started right here, at home. Mrs. Bannister was still comfortably placed, but it was better to be on the safe side, to build a wall that could *never* be broken down. She owed it to Esther, in fact, to take no chances with the future.

She went through into the girl's bedroom, to make her ready for the meeting.

The meeting that night was like any other meeting—which meant that it was a heart-warming success from the start. The hall was full, even though an entrance charge was made "to defray expenses;" Mrs. Bannister now advertised these meetings under the headline ESTHER COSTELLO ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS, and the appeal of this promised miracle seemed irresistible.

The audience applauded Mrs. Bannister's brief introduction (she had cut this down to the minimum, since Esther's story was so well known): they sat still as mice while the two of them demonstrated their methods of talking to each other; they responded generously when, during "question time," Esther's brave accomplishment became evident.

There was, at the start, every kind of person in that audience—earnest social workers, thrill-seekers, sceptics; but by the time an hour had passed, they were all one kind of person, at the same level of humanity and understanding. They had listened to Mrs. Bannister, watched Esther, seen their exchange of words, witnessed their communion; at the end, the leaven had so worked in them that they were all level in their admiration and their wonder.

From that feeling there sprang, as always, a proprietary joy in this lovely child—for here in Boston, she was their own Esther Costello; they were proud of her and Mrs. Bannister, and proud of a part of America which could, by love and compassion, produce so amazing a triumph.

When, towards the close, Mrs. Bannister introduced the theme: "Give Esther a thank-offering for your own eyesight," the response was brisk and unhesitating. While the three-piece orchestra played soft music of a coaxing kind, the volunteer helpers—girls who had been recruited during the past months—passed round the collecting-boxes; and then, as sometimes happened, individuals in the audience stood up to pledge their support.

Jewellery was passed up to Mrs. Bannister: watches and cigarette-cases reached the platform: ten- and twenty-dollar bills went from hand to hand until they arrived at the small table in front of Esther. Whenever this happened, Mrs. Bannister touched Esther's arm, and the girl smiled blindly and enchantingly—one warm heart greeting another. A man in the audience called out: "Tell her I'm sending along five hundred dollars in the morning!" and the applause lasted throughout the time that Mrs. Bannister was passing the message on to Esther.

At the end of this communication, they saw a fresh smile break

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over Esther's face, and after a moment's pause Mrs. Bannister said: "She says: 'Thank you, and thank God for people like you.'"

This generous interpretation of Esther's actual reply—"That's fine"—drew so great a volley of clapping that Mrs. Bannister recognized it as a suitable note on which to finish.

"We both thank you from the bottom of our hearts," she said quietly and gravely. "For your kindness to us this evening, for your generous help for all blind people . . . I shall tell Esther all about it tomorrow—she is tired tonight, as you can see."

Esther, responding to a covert touch, sat straight up and smiled, while the audience went "Ah-h-h . . ." on a low note of understanding and pity.

"You can see how brave she is," said Mrs. Bannister, looking down at her fondly. "Good night to all of you." She leant over, taking Esther's hand briefly. "And Esther says: 'Good night, and God bless you every one.'"

The audience rose, applauding to the last: the volunteers made for the exits, rattling their collecting-boxes; and at a signal from Mrs. Bannister, the orchestra played them out with their farewell number.

It was, as always, *When Irish Eyes are Smiling.*

Esther went straight to bed as soon as they returned to the apartment: she was always exhausted after these meetings, with their prolonged concentration and the knowledge that she was under the gaze of a crowd of people; Mrs. Bannister's public cherishing of her was not entirely showmanship. Mrs. Bannister looked down at the pale, spent face outlined on the pillow, then bent and kissed her forehead.

"Good night, my darling one," she said aloud, squeezing Esther's arm in the special grip which was their way of expressing their fondness for each other. "You did very well tonight."

Mrs. Bannister put out the bedroom light, and walked through into her own sitting-room. The big silver drink-tray had been made ready by the coloured maid, before she left for the night, and Mrs. Bannister poured a stiff highball, and carried it to the fireside armchair. For her, the strain of handling these meetings would never lessen, however proficient she might become—there was so much that could go wrong, quite apart from the skill needed to communicate accurately with Esther. Much of the meeting had been routine, of course: Mrs. Bannister knew what the audience had come to see, and the questions they asked—"Are you happy?" "How old are you?" "Do you remember Ireland?"—never varied much.

She had developed, for these occasions, a technique of presentation in which Esther now co-operated admirably. Among other things, it included a series of code grips and touches, which told Esther what she should do at any given moment.

There was a signal for "Sit up," there was another for "Smile;" there was one for "Laugh." It simplified both their tasks, to a very

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large extent. Of course, thought Mrs. Bannister, it was a kind of dishonesty, if you looked at it one way, since these reactions of Esther's always appeared spontaneous, always charmed the audience to distraction.

It was immoral, too, on a different plane; it meant treating Esther like a circus animal, showing off her tricks, putting her through the hoop while the crowd gaped.

And sometimes Mrs. Bannister improved on things of her own accord, making up what Esther was supposed to have said, in answer to questions, or "translating" her remarks to suit a particular audience or a particular moment of emotion. Very often, this was the only way a meeting could be properly controlled. People soon got bored, if things started dragging or questions were left in the air.

It didn't matter much, this "presentation," anyway. In fact, it didn't matter at all. Basically, the thing was on the level. She *could* talk to Esther, and be answered by her; the rest was simply a variation on their joint talents. It gave the audience what they wanted, what their goodwill and their support deserved.

The end-result, in any case, justified all this, since the end-result was money: money for the helpless. If one thought of that all the time, a little manipulation need not trouble one's conscience. It was all in a good cause. It was all for the needy.

It had worked well tonight, anyway. The takings had been fine—hall full, good collection, plenty of promises for the future. She hoped that the man who had guaranteed five hundred dollars would come across with it tomorrow. Sometimes they didn't live up to their undertakings—which was a pretty mean trick; not much better than stealing from the blind.

There was a ring at the apartment door.

Mrs. Bannister stirred and sat up, not perturbed. It was probably Barry Grant—he was still a very good friend to them, and often when they had a meeting in Boston he came along to it, and then looked in on his way home from the *Star-Telegram*. She was always glad to see him. She and Esther both owed a lot to Barry Grant.

But when she opened the front door, she found it was her husband.

★ ***Her husband! Mrs. Bannister reels back under the impact of the shock. The appearance of this sinister figure, with his elusive, persuasive charm, poses a huge question-mark across the whole future horizon.***

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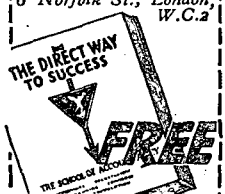

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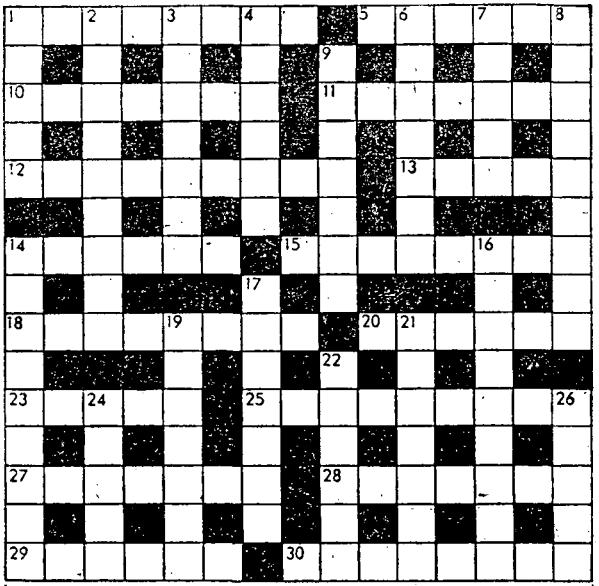

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CUT ALONG THIS LINE

CLUES

Across

1 The noble lady has gained a pound but lost her lord (8).

5 Colour of a deserted village (6).

10 This part of the fountain pen seems to be a reckless gambler (7).

11 He's sweet in the garden (7).

12 Vote, O Scot, but do so in a whisper (5, 4).

13 When I've gone the alternative is reduced to an anaesthetic (5).

14 Roses notoriously are; questions may be (6).

15 A blessed state, though it begins with the policeman's round (8).

18 Making certain that the premium is paid ? (8).

20 With the addition of an aspirate the reef becomes vocal (6).

23 New York and London contract to make this material (5).

25 He's more than a chemist, but he hasn't quite got everything (9).

27 A low deal, and muddled at that, but apparently it's permitted (7).

28 I'm on to the contents of auction rooms, they should be soothing (7).

29 A really tear-jerking tragedy should not leave one in the house (3, 3).

30 Makes a suggestion in favour of the model's work ? (8).

Down

1 Evidently the diarist has an eye for what goes on (5).

2 Outbreaks of violence on the mountain-top (9).

3 Straw hat worn by a hen-pecked Italian ? (7).

4 " Something afar from the sphere of our ——" (Shelley) (6).

6 Tugs lie in the most hideous possible arrangement (7).

7 David commanded that he be set in the forefront of the battle (5).

8 I'm nuclear, and can get into some sort of order (9).

9 It may deal with mines or carpets (7).

14 Coach an orchestra for John Gilpin's militia (5-4).

16 Slangily dismiss the poker and tongs ? (5-4).

17 Where and how medical students walk ? (7).

19 A truant and what he does (7).

21 This part of the shoe sounds like a dance step—not *performed* on the toes, however ! (4-3).

22 Demonstration which must be seen to be believed (6).

24 The French composer must have been good at cradle-songs (5).

26 Cricket matches beside a Hampshire river ? (5).

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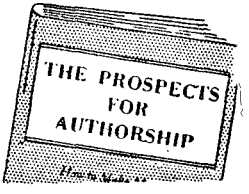

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